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ELLERY QUEEN'S *Mystery Magazine*

ALL-NEW ISSUE

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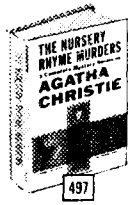

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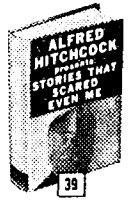

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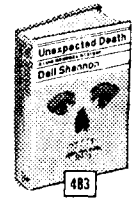

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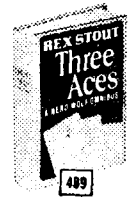

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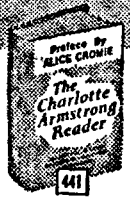

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the NEWEST short story by

EVAN HUNTER

It was the strangest thing that ever happened to eight-year-old David, or to his mother and father. It was the strangest thing that ever happened in the Park Avenue apartment house where David and his parents lived, or for that matter, that ever happened in the whole city of New York. And it wasn't just strangeness. It was something more . . . Evan Hunter is the author of THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE, *and as Ed McBain he created the 87th Precinct and has been giving us some of the best police procedurals written by an American. "Someone at the Door" is his newest short story, and you'll find it subtler and far more meaningful than it may at first appear . . .*

SOMEONE AT THE DOOR

by EVAN HUNTER

David's mother took him with her to Paris the day after his eighth birthday, which was July the fourth.

Paris was all lights. It was the best time he ever had in his life. Even if the business with the doorbell hadn't happened when they got back from Paris, he *still* would think of Paris as the best time he ever had. They were staying at a very nice hotel called the Raphäel on Avenue Kléber. Hardly anyone spoke English at the Raphäel because it was a very French hotel, and English was grating on the ears.

David learned a lot there. He learned, for example, that when someone asked *"Quel temps fait-il?"* you did not always answer, *"Il fait beau,"* the way they did in Miss Canaday's class even if it was snowing. He told this to Miss Canaday when they got back from Paris, and she said, "David, I like to think of the weather as being *toujours beau, toujours beau.*" He used to speak to the concierge on the phone every morning. He would say, *"Bonjour, monsieur, quel temps fait-il, s'il vous plait?"* And the concierge would

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usually answer in a very solemn voice, "*Il pleut, mon petit monsieur.*"

It rained a lot while they were in Paris.

He and his mother had a suite at the Raphäel, two bedrooms and a sort of living room with windows that opened onto a nice stone balcony. David used to go out on the balcony and stand with the pigeons when it wasn't raining. The reason they had a suite was that his mother was a buyer for a department store on Fifth Avenue, and they sent her over each year, sometimes twice a year, to study all the new fashions. What it amounted to was that the *store* was paying for the suite. David's father was account executive and vice-president of an advertising agency that had 39 vice-presidents. The reason he did not go to Paris that summer was that he had to stay home in New York to make sure one of his accounts did not cancel. So David went instead, to keep her company. He wrote to his father every day they were in Paris.

Escargots were little snails, but they didn't really look like snails except for the shell, and they didn't taste like them at all. They tasted like garlic. David and his mother ate a lot of *escargots* in Paris. In fact, they ate a lot of everything in Paris. They used to spend most of their time eating. What they would do, his mother would leave a call with the desk for eight o'clock in the morning. The phone would ring and David would jump out of bed and run into his mother's bedroom and ask her if he could talk to the concierge for a moment. "*Bonjour, monsieur,*" he would say, "*Quel temps fait-il, s'il vous plait?*" and the concierge would tell him what kind of day it was and then he would hand the phone back to his mother and lie in her arms while she ordered breakfast.

Every morning they had either melon or orange juice, and then croissants and coffee for his mother, and croissants and hot chocolate for David. The chocolate was very good; the room waiter told them it came from Switzerland. They would eat at a little table just inside the big windows that opened onto the stone balcony. His mother used to wear a very puffy white nylon robe over her nightgown. One morning a man in the building opposite waved at her and winked.

The salon showings usually started at ten in the morning. Some days there were no showings at all, and some days they would go to the showing at ten and then have lunch and go to another one at two, and

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then another one around cocktail time. His mother was a pretty important buyer, so she knew all the designers and the models and they used to go in the back and everybody would make a fuss over David. He didn't mind being kissed by all the models, who all smelled very nice. Once, when he went back before a showing, two of the models were still in their brassieres. One of them said something in French (she said it very fast, not at all like Miss Canaday or the concierge) and the other models started laughing, and his mother laughed, too. He didn't know what was so funny; he'd seen a *hundred* brassieres in his lifetime.

For lunch they used to like the cheese place best; it was called Androuet, and it had about 800 cheeses you could choose from. Every now and then they would go to a place on the Left Bank, but that was only when his mother was trying to impress a designer, and then David was supposed to just keep his mouth shut and not say anything, just eat. They had the most fun when they were alone. One night in the restaurant on top of the Eiffel Tower, his mother ordered red wine for him. She held up her glass in a toast and he clinked his glass against hers and saw that she was crying.

"What is it?" he said.

"Nothing," she answered. "Taste your wine, David. It's really lovely."

"No, what is it?" he insisted.

"I miss Daddy," she said.

The next day he sent his father a card from Notre Dame. On the back he wrote, as a little joke, "Can you find Quasimodo?" He had read *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* in *Classics Illustrated.* His father wrote back and in his letter he sent a thing that he had one of his art directors work up. It was a composite paste-up from the monster magazines, with very big type across the top saying: "Yes, *this* is Quasimodo! But where oh where is DAVID?"

The 14th of July, Bastille Day, fell on a Sunday and that was lucky to begin with because it meant there were no showings to attend. David woke up at eight o'clock and then slept for another two hours in his mother's bed and then they had breakfast and she said, "David, how would you like to go out into the country for a picnic?"

So that's what they did. They hired a car and drove out down by the Loire where all the French castles were, and they stopped by the river and had sausage and bread and cheese and red wine (his mother said it was okay for him to drink all

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the wine he wanted to while they were in France) and then they drove back to Paris at about seven in the evening, getting caught in the traffic around the Etoile. Later they stood on their little stone balcony and he held his mother's hand and they watched the fireworks exploding over the rooftops. He didn't think he would forget those fireworks as long as he lived.

The next week they were back in New York.

The week after that the doorbell started to ring.

The building they lived in was on Park Avenue and there were two apartments on their floor—their own and Mrs. Shavinsky's, who was an old lady in her seventies and very mean. Mrs. Shavinsky was the type who always said to David as he came off the elevator, "Wipe the mud off your shoes, young man." Mrs. Shavinsky wore hats and gloves all the time because she was originally from San Francisco. She was constantly telling the elevator operator, as if he cared, that in San Francisco all the ladies wore hats and gloves.

Even though there were only two apartments on the floor, there were four doors in the hallway because each apartment had two doors, one for people and the other for service. Their own main-entrance door was on one side of the hall, and Mrs. Shavinsky's was on the other side. The two service doors were in a sort of alcove opposite the elevator. They hardly ever saw Mrs. Shavinsky (except she always managed to be there when David got off the elevator, to tell him about his muddy shoes) until the business with the doorbell started, and then they practically lived in each other's apartment.

The first time the doorbell rang it was two o'clock in the morning on July 29th, which was a Monday.

David's bedroom was right behind his mother's and when the doorbell rang he sat up in bed thinking it was the telephone. In fact, he could hear his mother lifting the phone from the receiver alongside her bed, since she thought it was the phone, too. She said, "Hello," and then the ringing came again, from the front door, and there was a short silence. His mother put the phone back on its cradle and whispered, "Fred, you'd better get up."

"What?" David's father said.

"There's someone at the door."

"What?" he said again.

"There's someone at the door."

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His father must have looked at the clock near the bed because David heard him whisper, "Don't be ridiculous, Lo. It's two o'clock in the morning." His mother's name was Lois, but everybody called her Lo except David's grandmother who called her Lois Ann, which was her full name.

"Someone just rang the doorbell," his mother said.

"I didn't hear anything," his father said.

"Fred, please see who it is, won't you?"

"All right, but I'm telling you I didn't hear anything."

The doorbell rang again at just that moment. From the other end of the apartment, where the housekeeper slept, David heard her yelling, "Mr. Ravitch, there is somebody at the door."

"I hear it, Helga, thank you," David's father called, and then a light snapped on and David heard him swearing as he got out of bed. David went to the doorway of his room just as his father passed by in his pajamas.

"What is it?" David whispered.

"Someone at the door," he said. "Go back to bed."

His father walked through the long corridor leading to the front door, stubbing his toe on something in the dark and mumbling about it, and then turning on the light in the entrance foyer.

"Who's there?" he said to the closed door.

Nobody answered.

"Is someone there?" he called out.

Again there was no answer. From where David was standing at the end of the long hall he heard his father sigh and then he heard the lock on the door being turned and the door being opened. There was a moment's hesitation, then his father closed the door again and locked it, and began walking back to his bedroom.

"Who was it?" David asked.

"Nobody," his father answered. "Go back to sleep."

That was the first time with the doorbell.

The second time was two nights later, on a Wednesday, and also early in the morning, though not at two o'clock. David must have been sleeping very soundly because he didn't even hear the doorbell ringing. The thing that woke him up was his mother's voice saying something to his father as he ran down the corridor to the front door. Helga had come out of her room and was standing in her pajamas watching his father as he went to the door and unlocked it. David's mother was wearing the same white nylon

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puffy robe she used to wear when they were in Paris.

"Did they ring the doorbell again?" David asked her.

"Yes," she said, and just then his father opened the door.

"Who is it?" David's mother asked.

"There's no one here, Lo."

"But I heard the bell. Didn't you?"

"Yes, I heard it."

"I heard it, too, Mr. Ravitch," Helga said.

"I wonder," David's father said.

"What do you think?" David's mother asked.

"Maybe someone rang it by mistake."

"Monday night, too?"

"It's possible."

"And left without waiting for the door to open?"

"Maybe he was embarrassed. Maybe he realized his mistake and—"

"I don't know," David's mother said, and shrugged. "It all seems very peculiar." She turned to David and cupped his chin in her hand. "David, I want you to go back to bed. You look very sleepy."

"I'm not. We used to stay up much later than this in Paris."

"How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm?" his father said, and both his mother and Helga laughed. "Listen, Lo, I'd like to check this with the elevator operator."

"That's a good idea. Come, David, bed."

"Can't I just stay to see who it was?" David asked.

"There's probably some very simple explanation," his mother said.

The elevator operator was a man David had never seen before, about 50 years old, but with a hearing aid. David knew the other elevator man in the building, but he supposed this one always had the shift late at night, which is why he'd never seen him before. The man told his father his name was Oscar and asked him what the trouble was.

"Someone just rang our doorbell."

"Yes?"

"Yes. Did you take anyone up to our floor just now?"

"No, sir. Not since I came on, sir."

"And when was that?"

"I came on at midnight, sir."

"And you didn't take anyone up to the eleventh floor all night?"

"No, sir."

"What is it?" David heard a voice ask, and he looked past his father to the opposite end of the hallway where Mrs. Shavinsky had opened her door and was looking out. "What's all the noise about?" she said.

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"Do you realize what time it is?" She was wearing a big flannel nightgown with red roses strewn all over it, printed ones. Her hair was in curlers.

"I'm terribly sorry, Mrs. Shavinsky," David's father said. "We didn't mean to awaken you."

"Yes—well, you did," Mrs. Shavinsky said. "What's going on?"

"Someone rang our bell," his mother said.

"Good morning, Mrs. Shavinsky," David said.

"Good morning, young man," Mrs. Shavinsky said. "It is far past your bedtime."

"I know," David said. "We're up to catch the bell ringer."

"Did you say someone rang your bell?" Mrs. Shavinsky asked, ignoring David and looking at his mother.

"Yes. Monday night, and now again."

"Well, who was it?" Mrs. Shavinsky asked.

"That's what we don't know," David said. "That's why we're all here in the hallway."

"It was probably some d-r-u-n-k," Mrs. Shavinsky said.

"No, it wasn't no drunk, ma'am," Oscar said. "I didn't take nobody up here."

"Then why would anyone want to ring your bell at three thirty in the morning?" Mrs. Shavinsky asked, and no one could answer her.

Later David's mother kissed his cheeks and the tip of his nose and his forehead and hugged him tight and tucked him in.

Mrs. Shavinsky told David about her demitasse cups the next day and when he hinted that he would like to see them, she asked him to wipe off his feet and come into the apartment. The apartment smelled of emptiness, the way a lot of apartments smell when there is only one person living in them. She had her demitasse collection in a china closet in the dining room. David told her it must be fun to have a big dining-room table like the one she had, and then he looked at her demitasse cups, which were really quite nice. She had about 37 cups, he guessed. Four of them had gold insides. She said they were very valuable.

"How much do they cost?" he asked her.

"You should never ask anyone that," she said.

"Why not?"

"Because it is impolite."

"But you told me they were valuable, Mrs. Shavinsky."

"They are," she said.

"Then why is it impolite to ask how much they cost?"

"It's not only impolite," she

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said, "it's impertinent as well."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Shavinsky," he said.

"They cost several thousand dollars," she said. Her voice lowered. "Do you think the bell ringer is after them?" she asked.

"After what?" he said.

"After my demitasse cups?"

"I don't think so," he said.

"Then why would he ring your bell at three thirty in the morning?"

"I don't know, Mrs. Shavinsky, but it seems to me if he was after *your* cups he would ring *your* bell. Maybe he's after *our* cups."

"Do you have a valuable collection of demitasse cups, too?" Mrs. Shavinsky asked.

David shook his head.

"Then how, would you please tell me, could he be after *your* demitasse cups, if you do not even *own* demitasse cups?"

"I meant our coffee cups. In the kitchen."

Mrs. Shavinsky wasn't sure whether or not he was making fun of her, which he wasn't, so she sent him away.

That night the doorbell rang at one o'clock in the morning.

David was asleep but his father was still awake and watching the news on television. The doorbell rang and David's father leaped out of bed at the first ring and ran down the long hall to the front door and pulled open the door without saying a word.

There was no one there.

"Damn it!" he yelled, and woke up the whole house.

"What is it?" David's mother called.

"Damn it, there's no one here," his father said.

"What is it, Mr. Ravitch?" Helga called from her bedroom.

"Oh, go to sleep, Helga," his father said.

David was awake by this time but he knew better than to ask his father any questions. He just lay in bed watching the ceiling and realizing that the doorbell had rung again, and his father had gone to answer it again, and again no one was there. Through the wall separating his bedroom from his mother's he heard his father going into the room and getting into bed, and then he heard his mother whisper, "Don't be upset."

"I *am* upset," his father whispered back.

"It's probably just someone's idea of a joke."

"Some joke."

"He'll grow tired of it."

"He's got Helga scared out of her wits."

"She'll survive."

"How the hell does he disappear so quickly?" his father whispered.

"I don't know. Try to get

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some sleep, darling."

"Mmm," his father said.

"There."

"Mmmmm."

While David was investigating the hallway the next day, Mrs. Shavinsky's housekeeper came out with the garbage. Her name was Mary Vincent, but David was not sure whether Vincent was her last name or just part of her first name, the way "Ann" was part of his mother's "Lois Ann." When Mary Vincent came out with the garbage he was pacing off the number of steps from the stairway off the service alcove to the front doorbell.

"What are you doing, David?" Mary Vincent said.

"There are fifteen paces," he said. "How long do you think it would take to run fifteen paces from our door to those steps?"

"I don't know. How long would it take?"

"Well, I don't know, Mary Vincent. But whoever is ringing the doorbell manages to disappear before we can open the door. If he doesn't use the elevator, he *must* use the steps, don't you think?"

"Unless it's an inside job," Mary Vincent said.

"What does that mean? An inside job?"

"Somebody in the apartment."

"You mean somebody in *our* apartment?"

"Could be," Mary Vincent said, and shrugged.

"Well, that would mean just my family." David paused. "Or Helga."

"I didn't say nothing," Mary Vincent said.

"Why would Helga want to ring the doorbell in the middle of the night?"

"I didn't say nothing," Mary Vincent said again. "All I know is she was mighty angry while your mother and you were away in France and she had to stay here and work, anyway, without no kind of a vacation."

"But she is getting a vacation. Mother asked her if she wanted to take her vacation when we went away or in August sometime, and Helga said August."

"That ain't what she told me right here in this hallway, David."

"When was this?"

"When we were putting out the garbage."

"I mean *when*."

"When you and your mother were in France."

"Well, that sounds awfully strange to me," David said.

"It sounds strange to me, too," Mary Vincent said, "that somebody would be ringing your doorbell in the middle of the night."

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"I don't even see how Helga could manage it," David said.

"Her bedroom is right close to the service entrance, ain't it?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then what's to stop her getting out of bed, opening the back door, ringing the front doorbell, and then coming in again through the back door and right into her bed? What's to stop her, David?"

"Nothing, I guess. Only—"

"Only what?"

"Only why would she want to?"

"Spite, David. There's people in this world who do things only because it brings trouble and worry to others. Spite," Mary Vincent said, "plain and simple spite. If I was you, David, I would keep my eye on her." Mary Vincent laughed, and then said, "In fact, I would keep *both* my eyes on her."

David started keeping his eyes on her that very night because the doorbell rang at exactly 2:13 A.M. David had a watch that was waterproof and shock resistant—his grandfather had given it to him for his seventh birthday. When he heard the doorbell ring he jumped up in bed and turned on the light and looked at the watch, and it was exactly 2:13 A.M.

"There it goes again," he heard his father say in the next room, but David was listening for sounds coming from the back door. He didn't hear anything. The doorbell rang again.

"Let him ring," his father said. "If he thinks I'm getting out of bed every night he's crazy!"

The doorbell rang again. David still hadn't heard a sound from Helga's room. He kept looking at the sweep hand of his watch. It was now 2:15.

"Are you just going to let it ring?" his mother whispered.

"Yep," his father said.

"All night?"

"If he *wants* to ring the damn thing all night, then I'll *let* him ring it all night."

"He'll wake up Mrs. Shavinsky."

"So he'll wake up Mrs. Shavinsky."

"He'll wake up the whole building."

"Who cares?" David's father said, and his mother giggled, and the doorbell kept on ringing. David still hadn't heard a peep from Helga.

"Mom?" he said.

"David? Are you awake?"

"Yes. Do you want me to see who's at the door?"

"You stay right in your bed," his father said.

"Someone's ringing the doorbell," David said.

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"I hear it."

"Shouldn't we see who it is?"

"We know who it is. It's some nut who's got nothing better to do in the middle of the night."

"Mom?"

"You heard your father."

"Are we just gonna let him ring the damn thing all night?" David asked.

"What?" his father said.

"Are we gonna let him ring the damn thing all—?"

"I heard you the first time," his father said.

"Well, are we?"

"If he wants to. Go to sleep. He'll get tired soon enough."

The bell ringer didn't get tired soon enough. David kept watching the red sweep hand on his wrist watch; the bell ringer didn't get tired until 2:47 A.M., more than half an hour after he had begun. In all that time Helga hadn't said a word. It was almost as if she wasn't even in the house.

For the next two weeks the doorbell rang almost every night at 2:00 in the morning or a little after. David's father let it ring each time, without getting out of bed to answer it. Once, while the doorbell was ringing, David sneaked out of bed and went to the other end of the apartment, near the service entrance, to see if Helga was in her room. But the door to her bedroom was closed and he couldn't tell if she was there or not. The doorbell woke the entire family each time but they simply pretended it wasn't ringing. Each time David's mother would come into his bedroom after the doorbell had been ringing a while, to see if it had awakened him.

"David?" she would whisper.

"Yes, Mom."

"Are you awake?"

"Yes, Mom."

"You poor darling," she would say, and then she would sit on the edge of his bed and put her hand on his forehead, the way she would sometimes do when she thought he had a fever, though he certainly didn't have any fever. The doorbell would continue ringing and his mother would sit in her nightgown in the dark, her hand cool on his head. In a little while she would kiss his closed eyes and he would drift off to sleep, not knowing when she left him, not knowing when the doorbell stopped ringing.

This went on for two weeks. By the end of that time David was getting used to waking up at two in the morning and getting used to his mother's visits each time the doorbell rang. He was beginning to think, though, that once Helga left on her vacation, the

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doorbell ringing would stop. He was beginning to think that Mary Vincent was right—that Helga was ringing the bell just out of spite, just to cause trouble and worry for others.

But on August 12th, Helga left and that night at two o'clock the doorbell rang. It couldn't have been Helga because she had taken a plane that morning at Kennedy Airport, bound for Copenhagen where her parents lived.

The next day David's father called the police.

It was David's guess that his father had suspected Helga, too, because he told the two detectives right away that it *couldn't* have been the housekeeper since she was now in Denmark. That explained why he hadn't called the police up to now; he *had* thought it was Helga and had expected her to quit ringing the bell after a while.

The two detectives didn't look anything like television policemen at all. One of them looked like Mr. Hartman who had the candy store on Madison Avenue and the other one looked like Uncle Martin, David's father's brother. Mr. Hartman did most of the talking.

"When did your housekeeper leave?" he asked David's father.

"Yesterday morning."

"And you say the doorbell rang again last night?"

"Yes, it did."

"Who else lives on this floor?" Mr. Hartman asked.

"Mrs. Shavinsky and her housekeeper."

"Her name is Mary Vincent," David said.

"Thank you, son," Mr. Hartman said. "Would either Mrs. Shavinsky or her housekeeper have any reason to want to annoy you?"

"I don't think so," David's father said.

"He may be after Mrs. Shavinsky's demitasse cups," David said.

"What was that, son?" asked the one who looked like Uncle Martin.

"Mrs. Shavinsky's demitasse cups. They're worth thousands of dollars."

"If the intruder wanted *her* cups," Uncle Martin said, "why would he ring *your* doorbell?"

"That's just what I said to Mrs. Shavinsky."

"Is there anything you can do about this?" David's father asked the detectives. "Can you leave a man here?"

"Well, that would be a little difficult, sir," Mr. Hartman said. "We're always shorthanded but especially in the summertime. I think you can understand—"

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"Yes, but—"

"What we *can* do, of course, is to dust the hallway and the doorbell for fingerprints."

"Will that help?"

"If the intruder left any prints it could help a great deal."

"And if he didn't leave any prints? If, for example, he was wearing gloves?"

"Then it wouldn't help at all."

"Well, if you can't leave a man here," his father said, "and if dusting or whatever you call it doesn't come up with any fingerprints, what are we supposed to do? Just let this person keep on ringing our doorbell forever?"

"I suppose you could spend a night sleeping in a chair near the door," Mr. Hartman said. "That might help."

"How?"

"You could open the door as soon as the bell rang."

"We never know when it's going to ring," David's father said, "or even *if* it'll ring at all. There's no pattern to it."

"Well, perhaps you could spend a few nights sleeping by the door."

"I could spend a few *weeks* sleeping by the door," David's father said. "Or maybe even a few *months*."

"Well," Mr. Hartman said.

"Well," David's father said, and then everybody was quiet.

"Mrs. Shavinsky thinks it's some drunk," David said.

"It might be, son," Uncle Martin said.

"He doesn't use the elevator."

"He probably comes up the service steps," Mr. Hartman said. "We'll talk to the elevator operators and ask them to keep their eyes open. Though, you know, there's the possibility he comes down from the roof. I'll check and see if there's a lock on the roof door."

"Why would anyone be doing this?" David's father asked.

"The world is full of nuts," Mr. Hartman said. "This is something like calling up a stranger on the telephone, only this guy uses your doorbell."

"But how long will he continue bothering us?"

"Who knows?" Mr. Hartman said. "It can go on forever or he can get tired next week. Who knows?"

"Well," David's father said.

"Well," Mr. Hartman said—and that was that.

That night David's father slept on a blanket in the entrance hall and the doorbell didn't ring.

The next night he slept in the bedroom and the doorbell rang at two o'clock.

The night after that he slept

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in the bedroom again but this time the doorbell didn't ring.

At breakfast the next morning he told David's mother there was no way to figure this damn thing out but that night he slept just inside the entrance door again. David woke up with a nightmare at about one o'clock and went into his mother's bedroom. He climbed into bed with her and she held him in her arms and said, "What is it, darling?"

"I'm afraid," David said.

"Of what?"

"That he'll get Daddy."

"No one's going to get Daddy."

"Suppose Daddy opens the door and he's standing there? Suppose he kills Daddy?"

"No one's going to kill Daddy. Daddy is very strong."

"Suppose. What would we do?"

"Don't worry about it. Nothing's going to happen to Daddy."

"I don't want anything to happen to Daddy."

She put him back in his own bed in a little while and he lay there and looked at his watch and wondered if the doorbell would ring that night. He was just falling asleep again when it went off. It went off with a long loud ring and then a short sharp ring but by that time his father was on his feet, making a lot of noise and unlocking the door as quickly as he could and throwing the door open and running into the hallway.

David lay in bed with his heart beating faster and faster, waiting for his father to come back. At last he heard him close the door and walk through the apartment to the bedroom.

"Did you see him?" David's mother asked.

"No. But I heard a door slamming."

"What do you mean?"

"As I was unlocking *our* door, just after the ringing, I heard a door slamming somewhere."

"Probably the door leading to the service steps."

"Yes," David's father said. He paused. "Where's David? Is he asleep?"

"Yes. He had a bad dream a little while ago."

"Poor kid. What shall I do, honey? Do you think our friend will be back tonight?"

"I doubt it," David's mother said, and paused. Her voice through the bedroom wall sounded very funny when she spoke again. "Come here," she said.

That night was the last time the doorbell rang.

What had happened, David supposed, was that his father had frightened the intruder

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away. He had jumped to his feet at the first long ring and was already unlocking the door by the time the intruder had pressed the bell the second time, which was probably why the second ring had been so short. The intruder must have realized a trap had been set, so he ran for the service steps just as David's father unlocked the door. That was probably the sound his father had heard—the service-steps door slamming behind the intruder as he ran away. David's father didn't get to see anyone by the time he rushed into the hallway, but he certainly must have scared whoever had been ringing the bell because that was the end of it.

In September school started and Helga came back from Denmark with stories about everything she had done. David began thinking about Paris again only because Helga had just come back from Europe. He would lie in bed each night and think about Paris and one night he suddenly got the idea. He began laughing and then stuck his head under the pillow because he didn't want them to hear him in the bedroom next door. He kept laughing, though, under his pillow. It seemed to him that it would be a great joke. The more he thought about it, the funnier it seemed.

He took his head out from under the pillow and listened. The apartment was quiet. He threw back the covers, got out of bed, tiptoed to the door of his mother's bedroom, and peeked in. She was lying with his father's arms around her, the blanket down over her hip, sort of.

David covered his mouth with his hand because he felt another laugh coming on and then he tiptoed to Helga's bedroom. Her door was closed. He could hear her heavy breathing behind it.

He went to the service door of the apartment.

Carefully he unlocked the door without making a sound, trying his best not to laugh. Then he opened the door and peeked out into the service alcove. No one was there. It seemed to him that he could almost hear the whole building breathing in its sleep.

He picked up an empty milk bottle from where it was standing outside the service door and used it to prop the door open and then went out of the service alcove and into the area just outside the elevators. He listened to make sure the elevator wasn't coming up and then he went to the front door.

He almost laughed again.

He listened.

He couldn't hear anything.

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This was going to be a great joke.

He reached out for the doorbell.

He rang the bell once. He heard it ringing inside the apartment. What he was going to do was run right back through the service entrance and then pretend he didn't know what had happened, if he could keep a straight face. He was only going to ring the bell that once, as a joke. But somehow, standing there in the hallway with the building asleep all around him, he rang the bell again. And then, he didn't know why, he rang it again. And again.

As he rang it he could remember the phone ringing each morning at eight o'clock at the Hôtel Raphäel, and his running into his mother's bedroom and climbing into her bed to ask the concierge *Quel temps fait-il?* He kept ringing the bell and ringing it. He didn't even hear the front door when it opened. His father was in pajamas, his mother was standing beside him in her nightgown.

"David!" she said. "What are you doing?"

David started to smile, half expecting his mother to laugh or run her hand over his head. But instead she was looking down at him with a very puzzled look on her face and he decided not to smile because he had the feeling something terrible was going to happen, though he didn't know what. He ducked his head.

"I'm sorry," he said.

They were all quiet for a while and then his father said, "Why did you ring the doorbell, David?"

"I don't know."

"You rang it, didn't you?" his father said.

"Yes."

"Well, why?"

"I thought it would be a good joke."

"A *what?*" his father said.

"A joke."

"A joke? After all we went through last month? You thought it would be a joke to—"

"I didn't do it last month."

"I know that but how could you—"

"This is the first time I ever rang it."

"I know that," his father said, and the hallway became silent.

"Why did you do it, David?" his mother asked.

He looked up at her, wanting to explain, but a hundred crazy things popped into his head instead. He wanted to say, Mom, do you remember the little stone balcony with the big windows where we used to have

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our breakfast every morning, do you remember the man who waved and winked at you? He wanted to say, Mom, do you remember the models kissing me at the salons and those two with their brassieres that time, the way you laughed, do you remember? Do you remember driving out to have a picnic lunch by the Loire on Bastille Day, and the wild traffic around the Etoile that night when we drove back into the city, and the fireworks later, do you remember holding my hand on the little stone balcony outside our room?

"Why?" she asked again. "Why did you ring the doorbell, David?"

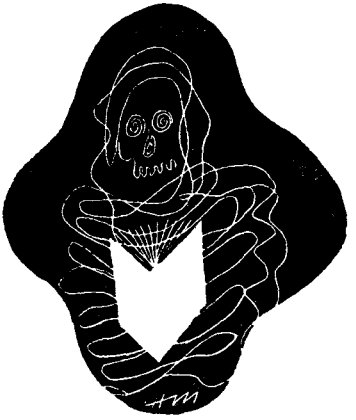
"I don't know," he said.

"You *must* have had a reason," his mother insisted.

"No, Mom," he said. "I didn't have any reason."

She kept looking at him.

His father sighed then and said, "Well, it's very late. Let's all get back to bed."



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continuing the NEW series of

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LAWRENCE TREAT

Police procedural-with-human interest: no paradox and no contradiction there. But a story of homicide-and-heart? Not a likely combination at all. But see what Lawrence Treat does with it in this newest story in his series of "telling it like it is." To Mr. Police Procedural himself—as to Lieutenant Becker and his squad—a murder is a murder no matter where or who . . .

R AS IN ROOKIE

by LAWRENCE TREAT

All they had, there on the Homicide Squad, was what some kid said he'd heard from over on the other side of a fence. And the kid, he was just a scrawny, scared little thirteen-year-old with a runny nose and a rip in his shirt, and he was standing all alone in the squad room and just about managing to keep the tears back. And blurting out the same thing over and over again.

"What he said was, 'See that cat? I'm gonna kill him dead.' Then somebody else said what for, and the first guy, he said, 'Because I don't like his puss.' Then I heard a shot, so I beat it."

"What about the guy that got shot? Didn't he say anything? Didn't he even yell?"

"I didn't hear nothing," the kid said. Which figured, on account the victim was a mute. They called him Dummy, down in the dock section. Still, can you believe what a thirteen-year-old kid says?

Lieutenant Decker did, and that was good enough for Mitch Taylor and the rest of the Homicide Squad.

Still, with no other evidence, no other witnesses, no other anything, where were you? Everybody on the block had cotton in their ears or closed their windows and went to the backs of their apartments or else flew off into space

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somewhere so they wouldn't be home and hear anything that could help the cops. Which was the way things were there.

In the old days when there was river traffic, that part of town had been in the warehouse section where the carts and the trucks used to load up. They said it was prosperous then, but Mitch Taylor wouldn't know about that. What he saw was a bunch of run-down firetraps which for the past ten years they said they were going to tear down for urban renewal, except the money got lost somewhere in the city administration. So the dope pushers and the rats took over, and if there was a couple of homicides every couple of months, who cared?

There was no pressure on the Homicide Squad for this one. Lieutenant Bill Decker could forget about it if he wanted to, and leave it out of his reports; the Commissioner would thank him in private for maybe helping keep down the statistics.

Only the boss wasn't that kind. To him a homicide was a homicide no matter where or who, and this one, that nobody else gave a damn about, was the same as all the others. And maybe a lot worse. Just killing a guy for no reason at all, for Pete's sake!

Still, two weeks went by and nothing happened, except Mitch got saddled with this blue-eyed, curly-haired, pink-eared rookie with a college diploma. You see, Decker had a new theory buzzing around in his head that police work ought to be a regular profession and you ought to study it in college, with special courses and even a special degree. Once you had all that under your hat, Decker claimed, you could learn the rest of it in a few months, and this kid was the experiment, and Mitch was supposed to make a real cop out of him.

The boss told Mitch to take him in tow and show him which way the wheels turned round. The kid—his name was Richard Sutton, only Mitch and everybody else called him Dicky-Boy. It seemed he was up on police administration and traffic control and lab stuff, but he'd skipped all the other police courses on account he hadn't made up his mind to be a cop until his last year in college. Decker hadn't picked him—he'd left that up to the college. So they'd come up with Dicky-Boy, and here he was.

Mitch knew pretty much what the boss was after, and Mitch felt like a father and Dicky-Boy could have been his son. Like Mitch said to Amy, maybe some day he'd be doing

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the same thing for Joey. Which made Amy smile, because she had other ideas for Joey. In her mind Joey was a born lawyer, and once he got to law school he'd knuckle down and those low marks of his would be gone like an ice cube in hot tea. And that's a mother for you, every time.

Anyhow, Mitch and Dicky-Boy hit it off pretty good, except maybe at the start when Dicky-Boy called him "sir." And that kind of riled Mitch.

"Can it," he said. "The only time a cop says 'sir' is to the big brass, like the Commissioner. And while you say it out loud, what you call him to yourself is something else again. Got it?"

The kid nodded. "I guess so, except the way I was brought up—"

"That," Mitch said, "is what you're here to forget."

"I'll try," Dicky-Boy said. "I guess I have a lot to learn."

Mitch agreed.

They were tooling along real slow, with Mitch at the wheel of the patrol car and going nowheres in particular. He was kind of pointing out stuff that could be useful to the rookie, like the joint where they fenced jewelry or where some of the gangs hung out and where the boundaries were between the different political territories, so you knew whom to arrest and whom to lay off. Things like that, they ought to give the kid the feel of the place.

"What I'm going to tell you now," Mitch said, and he meant every word, "is the most important lesson you're ever going to learn, and it's this: the first thing you got to do is stay alive. Don't stick your neck out, don't take chances, don't try and be a hero. Just get along with the squad and make friends with the guys in the Records Bureau and Motor Vehicles and all the rest of them. Because you can't do nothing alone."

The kid barely missed out saying "sir," but he stopped in time. "And stoolies," he said. "I guess you need them."

"You build up a few contacts after a while," Mitch said off-hand. "Now you see that guy over there? The guy with the green hat?"

"What about him?" Dicky-Boy asked.

"Name of Gosse," Mitch said. "Ernie Gosse. He's a pusher, and he'll give me a tip once in a while for letting him alone."

"You *let* him sell dope?"

"Nothing I can do about it," Mitch said. "That's up to the Narcotics Squad, and you don't want to step on *their* toes. I know he's selling the stuff, but that don't mean I got any

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evidence. But he thinks I could turn him in, so he calls me any time he hears something he thinks I'm interested in."

"Don't you ever see him?"

"See him?" Mitch said. "Look—if I stopped now and said hello to him, he'd be dead tomorrow."

"Shot?"

"Hell, no! They don't shoot people in the narcotics racket. They all use the stuff, which is cut down with sugar and milk, so when you want to get rid of one you go and give them a hot shot. Pure H, that is. They don't know the difference when they take it, and next day they're found dead from an overdose, and what can we prove? Nothing. All this talk you hear about 'the perfect crime'—they pull one off practically every day, and there's not a thing we can do about it."

Dicky-Boy swallowed hard and concentrated, like he'd got it straight out of the barrel bung and wanted to memorize what he'd just learned. No addict ever gets shot, he just gets an overdose.

So that night Gosse went and got killed. By a bullet. Making a liar out of Mitch.

The Lieutenant had been out to the scene of the crime, along with a couple of the boys. Jub Freeman, up in the lab, had been working on ballistics and the rest of the physical evidence, with an assist from Dicky-Boy. So in the morning, when the guys sat down in the squad room, the Lieutenant briefed them.

He didn't have much to tell. Gosse had been in the dock area on his way home; he was a couple of blocks from where he lived when a black car, going kind of slow, came down the street. When it got alongside Gosse, somebody stuck a gun out of the window and let fly. Four shots, with the first three of them missing, and that was about it, except they found Gosse with a gun in his hand that he'd never had the chance to fire.

Mitch kept looking at Dicky-Boy. The rookie read a lot of books, but this was his first swing around the carousel and he just sat there without trying to grab any brass rings. But Mitch could tell the kid had lost faith in him and probably wouldn't believe another thing Mitch ever said, unless Mitch somehow picked up the ball and started pitching strikes. Which Mitch did.

"This Ernie Gosse," he said, "he was in my cheering section and I know this much about him—he was a pusher and nothing else. A strict organization man, but in none of the

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rackets. If they wanted to get rid of him they'd give him a hot shot, like I explained to you; so when he's gunned down it's on account of a private war, like maybe if he's been playing around with somebody else's wife."

The squad pretty much went along with that, which saved Mitch as far as Dicky-Boy went. Then Balenkey, balancing on a chair near the wall, came up with a new idea.

"What kind of a guy misses three times at short range, and then drills his man on the fourth shot? If you ask me, those first three shots were meant to scare Gosse, that's all. But when Dummy pulled a gun, then they pinked him for real. Without he pulled a gun, that car would have gone on and Gosse would still be around. So the thing is, what did they want to scare him out of telling?"

Nobody knew, so that about wrapped it up and the boss started handing out assignments. On account Mitch had known Gosse, Mitch was elected Number One in the pecking order, which meant he was the one to go see the widow and find out what he could. For the rest, Mitch would check with Decker on anything that came up.

Mitch took Dicky-Boy along. Out in the courtyard Mitch got his regular car, Number Four, and he drove, and on the way to the dock area he explained things to the kid.

"They don't like cops where we're going," Mitch warned. "We ought to be okay, but you never know. Some hophead can always go haywire, so stay a couple steps behind me and keep your eyes open. Don't take your gun out, but make sure you can get hold of it fast, just in case."

"You can count on me," Dicky-Boy said, like the fate of the world was in his hands and he wanted to measure up.

"Yeah," Mitch said. "Now get this, and a lot of rookies been killed because they wanted to be brave or something. So don't take any chances. If you think a guy's armed, take your gun out first, but if he has the draw on you, take a dive. And whenever you do have to shoot, shoot to kill. There's more cops been cut down by wounded men than any other way."

"I'm a pretty good shot," Dicky-Boy said.

"Yeah," Mitch said. "Well, I guess we're about there."

He parked in front of Gosse's building, which Mitch didn't particularly like doing. But he reported where he was and where he was going, and then he locked the car. Like he explained to Dicky-Boy, they'd

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obeyed regulations and so they had no further responsibility for the car.

"You want to know the rule book," Mitch said, "because if you use it right, you can make it work your side of the street. You just got to know where they put the heavy print."

"I'll remember that," Dicky-Boy said.

Then they went into the downstairs hall and Mitch found the Gosse bell and pushed it. The buzzer answered right off and Mitch and Dicky-Boy went on up. Dicky-Boy was a couple of steps behind and he held one hand inside his jacket, and anybody around who happened to look could tell right off he was hanging onto his gun and was nervous and probably hadn't been a cop for more than a couple of weeks.

None of which bothered Mitch particularly. What got him, though, was all the smells, which started off with garlic and tomato paste, and then a little stale coffee with some dead mice thrown in. So Mitch was plenty glad he didn't have to go up more than those two flights.

The female who opened the door, she was Mrs. Gosse and she had a complexion like wrapping paper and she'd been crying. Even if she hadn't been, she looked like she'd been sat on a long time ago and never got up, so Mitch figured he was right about Gosse maybe running around with somebody else.

She took one look at Mitch and tried to slam the door in his face.

"No want you here," she said. "No want police."

"Ernie was a friend of mine," Mitch said, lowering his voice like he was telling her a secret. "He told you about me, didn't he?"

"Police!" she said, almost spitting.

"Ernie and me, we got along," Mitch said quietly. "So I want to help out."

"How you help?"

"I'll find out who did this, then tip you off. Like Ernie would want me to."

"You stand there," the Gosse female said, "and everybody hear what you say."

Which was maybe an invitation, or maybe she was scared that somebody would hear what Mitch was saying and figure out Ernie had been a stoolie. Anyhow, Mitch stepped inside, with Dicky-Boy and his gun right behind him.

The room had some fancy chairs and some photographs of guys dressed up in store clothes and looking unhappy, and some carved wooden figures of saints.

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The Gosse female didn't sit down.

"You know," Mitch said, friendly-like, "the last time I saw Ernie he said you were a good wife and if anything ever happened to him, would I take care of you. So here I am."

"He hate police," she said coldly.

"He hated the Narcotics Squad," Mitch said, "but me, I'm Homicide. Big difference. So, like I started to say, I want to find out things. To help you. And Ernie."

"I no know why he was killed," she said. "He was good man, he give people what they want. Not his fault they want—you know what."

"Yeah," Mitch said, still real friendly. "Ernie was all right."

"His customers, they all his friends. They like him, they depend on him. All he want was money for his family, and so he can sit home and carve. Look." She pointed to the wooden saints. "He make those. He make them fine."

"He was a real artist," Mitch said respectfully. "Now about this little fight you and him had—"

"What fight?" she asked, interrupting.

"That dame. He told me she was trouble and—"

"Liar!" Marie Gosse said sharply. "Liar-cop."

Mitch stared her down. "He wouldn't want you to call me that. Not me. Not to a friend of his."

"He no have other girl," she said angrily and proudly. "My husband a good man, we love plenty."

"Sure," Mitch said. "Now you want to get hold of the guy who did this to him, don't you? So I need your help."

She moved back like she didn't know how to handle him. Then, kind of shooing him out like a kid she couldn't get rid of without she gave him a piece of candy, she grabbed one of the wooden statues and stuck it in his hand.

"You want?" she said. "You take and you go."

Mitch nodded, accepted the statue, and holding it in front of him he went out and down the stairs.

The car was still where he'd left it. There were no new dents on it and nobody'd even spat on it; so Mitch unlocked it, picked up the two-way radio, buzzed the dispatcher, and reported back. Then Mitch put the phone down, stuck the key in the ignition, and leaned back.

"What do you think of this thing?" he said, indicating the carved saint.

"Pretty bad," Dicky-Boy said. "Did you really like the guy?"

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"Him?" Mitch said, kind of shocked. "He hung around the high school and tried to drum up trade. He hooked more kids than anybody else around. That was his specialty."

"But you told his widow he was all right."

"When you want information," Mitch said, "you have to kind of butter people up, and sometimes you learn things and sometimes you don't."

"But she didn't tell us anything."

"Think so?" Mitch said. "She told us a lot. The way she said they'd loved plenty and then she gave me this piece of junk—that means there was no other dame. If there had been she'd of got sore and stayed sore." Mitch turned on the ignition and started the car. "Well, I guess there's not much we can do for a day or two, except wait for the funeral. We might find out something there."

For the next couple of days the investigation kept going. The Narcotics Squad tried to find out who had a reason for rubbing out Ernie Gosse. The local precinct cops went around trying to locate somebody who'd witnessed the shooting. The Homicide Squad questioned Gosse's friends; Jub Freeman up in the lab analyzed bullets; and the Medical Examiner did an autopsy and came up with a long technical report that nobody understood except himself.

Meanwhile Mitch kept riding around town and instructing Dicky-Boy on how to be patient and expect nothing to happen until the funeral. At which time you couldn't expect much, either.

"We gotta be there," Mitch said, "that's all. There's a chance the killer will show, and there's a chance somebody's going to try and pick a fight with us. If they do, cool it. It might be the killer, and it might be just somebody that doesn't like cops. But the thing is, stay out of trouble."

"But it's our case!" Dicky-Boy said. "We have to solve it."

"Nuts," Mitch said. "We just hang around. That's what you got to learn—how to hang around without really doing anything."

Dicky-Boy looked puzzled.

Still, he couldn't have done better at the funeral. He stood there looking like a cop and proud of it, looking like he was after somebody and nothing could stop him. And that stance of his, it made everybody so uncomfortable that Mitch wandered around and nobody noticed him. Which was how he happened to pick up a couple of scraps of conversation.

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There was, for instance, the old uncle who wanted to know where Ramon was, and then a little later on Mitch heard somebody else say pretty much the same thing. So Mitch went up to some dame—he didn't know who she was, but she looked like she'd been left out of the party. She was maybe a relative who lived at the other end of town and wasn't wised up to what had really happened. So Mitch asked her where Ramon was.

She kind of stared like she didn't know Mitch was a cop and she was trying to place him. "You mean Ramon Gebba?" she said. Mitch nodded, and then she had sense enough to shut up. But he had what he wanted. Ramon Gebba had either shot Gosse, or knew something about who had.

You get a name like that and then you and the rest of the Homicide Squad pour it on. You go around asking where Ramon Gebba went, and either you're going to find him or you're going to scare him so that things begin to happen. Which maybe had something to do with the shooting the next day.

It was around three in the afternoon, and Mitch and Dicky-Boy were cruising out in the West Hills section. Mitch wanted to show the kid that junk yard where you might pick up stuff that would help out on a hit-and-run accident, like one that happened last night.

"Whoever it was," Mitch said, "he busted a headlight and he's gotta buy a new one. But he don't want to go anywheres that would report the sale, so what's left? Junk yards. And this place is the biggest. We ask the guy there if anybody bought a headlight, and if so, what he looked like, and so on. If nobody did, then we kind of look around anyhow and see what we can see."

That was when the radio phone buzzed. Dicky-Boy picked it up and it was the dispatcher calling Car Four and telling him to proceed to an address in the dock area where there'd been a shooting. So Mitch backed around, and it was one of the few times he used his siren. And when he turned it on he could see Dicky-Boy's eyes light up. This was what he'd dreamed about all his life, going hell-bent with the siren blaring and on his way to the scene of a crime.

A couple of precinct cops and the precinct lieutenant were waiting there, and so was Bankhart who'd been sort of in the neighborhood, but Mitch and Dicky-Boy were the next arrivals. They found out that a car had come down the street,

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slowed up in front of Number 476, fired about five shots, and then beat it. The shots had busted a couple of windows and made a broken line in the plaster wall of a room that had nothing in it except a mattress propped up on an old bedstead and covered with a torn Turkish rug.

The people in the building, naturally they'd seen nothing. They didn't know who'd occupied the room—they'd never seen anybody go into it or come out of it, they said. They'd been deaf and blind, which was pretty much what you expected around here. And while Mitch didn't have any real ideas, he figured it didn't hurt to pretend he knew that Ramon Gebba was behind this or connected with it.

The main trouble was, Mitch didn't know whether to guess that this Ramon had fired the shots or been fired at, so he had to ask his questions real cagey. He asked stuff like which way had Ramon gone, or else he said Ramon wasn't going to get away with it, and where was he? You ask enough questions like that, and pretty soon somebody tells you something. But not this time.

Mitch was kind of up in the air, not getting anywheres, but neither was anybody else. They couldn't even find the janitor, name of Ned Byrne, and that gave Mitch an idea.

"Let's go down to the boiler room," Mitch said to Dicky-Boy, "and look around."

There Mitch took a gander and pointed out a few violations—like the trash piled up over in one corner, and the way the furnace was gummed up with soot and then a stuck valve on one of the steampipes, and finally you added in a few leaks—you could always find one or two. All of which he noted down on his pad.

"A case like this," he said, "sometimes you got to play the angles. You take a couple of violations, you build them up, and you maybe got something on this Byrne guy. The next thing we got to do is find him."

"Where?"

"Around here," Mitch said, "every janitor's got himself a racket. It's maybe policy or maybe horses, something like that. You just got to look around a little, so let's you and me try a couple of neighborhood bars. We'll track him down easy."

In the second bar they tackled, Mitch spotted this flat-haired guy sitting on a stool at one end of the bar. He had a beer mug in front of him and two or three guys were listening to what he was saying, which was probably all about the

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shooting. Only when Mitch and Dicky-Boy came in, the guy clammed up, along with everybody else in the joint.

Mitch just said, "Byrne. Ned Byrne." Flat-Hair looked up, started to answer and didn't, which made him Ned Byrne, and so Mitch walked up to him.

"You and me," Mitch said, "we're going to have a little private talk. How about in back, huh?"

Mitch and Dicky-Boy followed Byrne to a table in the rear room, where Mitch sat down. But on the way he could tell from the low whispering that the guys here in the bar were expecting something. Which meant Mitch was hot, and he'd better watch out. But the thing was, how do you tip off Dicky-Boy without giving away that you heard the warning bell in your head and you're all set?

It looked like there was nothing much Mitch could do right off, so he started by taking out his identification. "I got a couple of questions about that shooting," Mitch said.

Byrne said what Mitch expected him to. "What shooting?"

"Better not horse around," Mitch said. "I got a bunch of violations at your place a yard long. They're your personal responsibility and I'm going to push them if I have to." He took out his pad. "Trash in the southwest corner, violation of Fire Department Regulation 187. Too much soot in the furnace, violation of pollution code of the Sanitation Department. Leaky steampipe, violation of Building Code. You know what the penalties are?"

"What do you want from me?"

"Who rented Apartment 1-C, into which the shots were fired?"

"Party by the name of Fesco. Rick Fesco."

"How long ago did he rent it?"

"About two weeks ago."

"Who lived with him?"

"Nobody. He was kind of holed up there."

"You mean he stayed there without going out?"

"Pretty much. I brought him his food, mostly."

"Okay," Mitch said. "Now where'll I find him?"

Byrne blinked, and Mitch could tell it was one of those times when somebody wants to tell you something, only they're scared. With the guys back there in the bar, if Byrne talked to a cop and gave out with anything, he'd be through and they wouldn't even let him in here for a drink. So Mitch was racking his brains how he could save face for Byrne and at the

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same time get him to talk.

Then Byrne said, "Don't one of you guys have to go to the Men's Room?" Which, as far as Mitch was concerned, was telling him where this Fesco was.

Mitch took out his pad and wrote down, "Watch yourself." Then he handed the note to Dicky-Boy and said, "Maybe you better go in there, huh?"

For the first time it looked like Dicky-Boy was learning, on account there was hope for him in the way he stood up like he was bored with the conversation and the hell with it. Then he crossed over and went into the Men's Room, and the guy he came out with was Gosse. Or at least that's what Mitch thought, first off. Then he realized it was somebody else. Still, the easiest thing in the world was to mistake one of them for the other, and that told Mitch plenty.

He said to Byrne, "Beat it." Then to the guy that looked like Gosse he said, "Sit down. Who are you?"

"Fesco."

"Sit down," Mitch said again, and Fesco did. "What's your real name?" Mitch said. "You Ernie's brother?"

"Me?" Fesco said. "Naah. He was my half brother."

"He got shot by mistake," Mitch said, guessing but pretty sure it was a good guess. "Ramon wanted to scare you and he shot at Gosse thinking it was you. When Gosse reached for a gun, Ramon killed him, but Ramon still had to throw a scare into you, which is what he did this afternoon. Okay, but what for?"

"You got it all wrong," Fesco said.

Mitch shook his head. "Why did he do it?" he said. "What have you got on Ramon?"

"Nothing. Not a thing."

It was the same business as with Byrne, and it was up to Mitch to find a way of getting Fesco's information without the guys in the bar catching on that Fesco was giving anything away. So Mitch leaned forward and spoke in a low voice.

"Look," he said. "If I let you go, you're a dead duck, because Ramon will figure either you squealed or you'll squeal next time we talk to you. He won't take a chance on you, and you know it, so why don't I put the bracelets on you and take you to a nice safe place? Then it will look like you didn't talk, so I had to bring you in. And we'll keep you under wraps until we get hold of Ramon. How about it?"

Fesco didn't say anything. He just held out his wrists and waited for the handcuffs to get snapped on. And Mitch, want-

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ing to tell Dicky-Boy what a dope Fesco was, said, "Dummy, huh?"

Fesco, with his arms still out, kind of jerked in surprise. "Dummy," he said. "That's right. I was with Ramon when he shot Dummy, only how'd you know?"

"Easy," Mitch said, without even blinking. Then he saw the guy in the doorway and he yelled, "Duck!"

It had to be Ramon standing there. He fired, and Fesco's head got almost slapped off his neck and he went spinning around and dropped off the chair. Mitch moved with the shot and made a dive for the corner of the room and the protection of a table, where he went rolling over. And kept rolling until he was behind a screen. While it wouldn't stop any bullets, Ramon couldn't see him to take dead aim.

What Dicky-Boy did was what only a rookie cop would do. He yelled at Ramon, "Drop that gun!" Then Dicky-Boy pulled his own gun, and he stood up and waited to be obeyed, brave as hell and a perfect target. Which Mitch didn't know about until a few seconds later, after three shots that practically split his eardrums and after he poked his head out from behind the screen. He had his gun out by then and was ready to shoot, only there was nobody to shoot at any more. Because Dicky-Boy was lying there on the floor and Ramon had run out to the street, where half the Homicide Squad saw him and mowed him down in nothing flat. All of which was no help to Dicky-Boy.

Mitch put his arm around him. "You hurt?" Mitch said, real anxious.

"I'm hurt bad," Dicky-Boy muttered. "I shot, but I shot too late and I aimed at his arm. Should have done what you told me to."

"Yeah," Mitch said. "You'll be okay. Next time—" Only Mitch knew there wasn't going to be any next time.

Amy heard about it over the radio, and she was quiet when Mitch came home. He didn't talk about it, either. He didn't feel much like talking about anything, and the kids, Mamie and Joey, they kind of sensed something and kept themselves out of his way. But Mitch kept looking at Joey. Eight years old and a good kid; sweet like kids are at that age, only he got bad marks at school. So what was he going to be when he grew up?

Not a cop. In a way it was like Mitch was being told that if Joey ever became a cop he'd be just like Dicky-Boy, he'd want

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to be brave. But as for being a lawyer, the way Amy wanted, Joey just didn't have the brains. So what was there?

Later on, just before Joey went to bed, Mitch sat the kid on his lap and started telling him a story. It was all about a parole officer; he was a nice kind of guy and he played on the parole-board baseball team, and he was a humdinger of a parole officer.

Joey's eyes sort of caught fire at that, and Mitch smiled and went on with the story. Being a parole officer wasn't bad; not as good maybe as being a detective, but not bad—not bad at all.

FELONY

The law locks up both
man and woman
Who steals the goose from
off the common,
But lets the greater felon
loose
Who steals the common
from the goose.

ANONYMOUS

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NEW kind of DETECTIVE from JON L. BREEN

Something different! A new kind of detective! Meet Ed Gorgon, a Major League baseball umpire, a diamond dick in a tight spot . . . It is especially appropriate to publish a baseball mystery at this time—when the mystery of which teams will win the pennants, which teams will win the playoffs, which team will win the World Series next month—when all these mysteries are crackling in the air and on the sports pages . . .

DIAMOND DICK

by JON L. BREEN

Disrespect for constituted authority is nothing new, my friends. Why, it's an American tradition. I should know that this is true better than anybody, because I've been a baseball umpire for 25 years. I'm Ed Gorgon. Maybe you've seen me on TV.

It's an interesting job, and I like it fine, frustration and all. That's why I was so anxious not to lose it after that incident in New Hopton last season. I had to make like a detective and clear my good name. Of course, umpiring and detective work have a good deal in common anyway, though I won't be led off on that tangent just now.

Two background facts you should know: first, I am a Southerner, born and brought up in Montgomery, Alabama; and second, about a year ago I gave an interview to a newspaper sportswriter, something an umpire should be careful not to do too often, especially when the writer is a hostile Yankee (no relation to the ball team). I was quoted out of context in his story in such a way that I came out sounding like a racist, something I am not. Like everybody else I'm subjected to some prejudices, but I can keep my conscious mind policed, even if I lack control over what's under the surface; and I can tell you sincerely that I do my best to treat all men alike.

That's the background. We take you now, as they say on the news, to beautiful New Hopton Stadium. It's the top of

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the ninth inning and the New Hopton Grizzlies (they're one of the new expansion teams you probably have trouble keeping track of) are leading Chicago 6-3. Their scoreboard (one of the fanciest in the Major Leagues) has deserted its commercial announcements (DON'T MISS BAT NIGHT A WEEK FROM SATURDAY) and group announcements (WELCOME TO THE NEW HOPTON ELKS CLUB) and taken up cheerleading—a frenzy of GO-GO and CHARGE! and that sort of thing. It's a small crowd but they're on edge. New Hopton isn't winning many, and they can smell a victory.

I'm working behind home plate. Joey Gilbert, the Grizzlies' starting pitcher, a tall skinny kid only a couple of years out of college, is struggling. He's given up a hit and a walk in the top of the ninth and has nobody out. He and his catcher, Ben Butcher, have been on me all night. According to Gilbert, he's never thrown a ball outside the strike zone since his Little League days.

A pinch hitter comes to bat for Chicago—a little Cuban fellow in a clean uniform and freshly shined shoes. He crouches over the plate, making a very small strike zone for Gilbert to aim at. The first pitch is a little high and I call it a ball.

The catcher Butcher grunts. "Damn midget. Didn't you use to work for Bill Veeck?" In Veeck's days as a baseball owner he hired a midget with the idea of sending him up to bat in bases-loaded situations, figuring he'd walk every time. However, this ploy was promptly outlawed.

Although Butcher apparently agrees the last one was a ball, Gilbert still glares at me, as though from habit.

The next pitch appears to hit the dirt and bounces back to the screen, the two runners advancing to third and second. The batter says to me, "It hit my foot."

"Let's see the ball," I say, and the catcher tosses it to me. I take a look and tell the batter, "Take your base."

Poor persecuted Joey Gilbert lets out a roar on the mound, and Butcher tears off his catcher's mask and stamps his foot like a kid in a tantrum. "That didn't touch him! It must have bounced a foot away from him!"

I show him the ball. "Shoe polish," I tell him.

Another red face has joined us in the meantime. Kelly Drummond, the Grizzlies' manager, is not about to listen to my explanation. I allow him his

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usual ranting time and then threaten to kick him out of the game. When he's pacified I show him the evidence on the ball. The shoe-polish bit is nothing new, of course. There was that incident in the 1969 World Series, you may recall.

Drummond decides he'd rather talk to his pitcher than be banished to the clubhouse, so he goes out and holds a conference on the mound. Butcher and Gilbert and Vic Bilben, their shortstop and field captain, exchange a few remarks. Gilbert, red-faced, starts to stomp around when Drummond signals the bullpen he wants his right-handed relief pitcher. The little red golf cart appears from behind the bullpen fence out in right field, and Mickey Fogarty is revealed as the passenger, keeping his right arm in the sleeve of his jacket during the ride around the track.

The crowd cheers. In New Hopton, like no other town, they actually enjoy seeing their starting pitcher chased, because Mickey Fogarty is the one bright spot on the dim Grizzlies' scene and they love to see him get in. He pitches an inning or two in about half their games—a busy kid.

Fogarty, a short stocky fellow in contrast to the skinny giant he's replacing, strolls confidently to the mound. Gilbert tosses him the ball and sulks his way off to a round of applause from the small crowd. Drummond follows him off, giving me an evil glare on his way.

Fogarty gets oohs and aahs on his warmup pitches. He really throws some smoke. To heighten the effect, he has thick glasses, like Ryne Duren used to wear. This often scares batters into thinking he can't see where he's throwing; but unlike Duren, Fogarty has great control. Not much finesse, but with his arm he doesn't need it. In a few years, when the smoke he throws is only a smolder, he'd better develop an extra pitch, I say to myself.

The next Chicago batter comes up. The first pitch blazes down the middle and I call it a strike. He doesn't get the bat off his shoulder. The second pitch is the same story.

The hitter turns to me and says, "That one sounded high." Butcher laughs, but it's an old joke.

The next one is low and outside. With two strikes on the hitter, Fogarty doesn't want to throw anything too good. The batter swings weakly at the next pitch, and there's one out.

The next hitter is Chicago's current version of "the Mighty Casey," a real long-ball slugger.

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He takes hard swings at the first two whether he can see them or not, and if he'd made contact I'm sure the ball would have carried into the next county. With two strikes on the hitter, Fogarty throws his nickel slider (a full-value slider is what we used to call a nickel curve) and the batter looks at it for strike three. I get another dirty look.

Now instead of no outs with the bases full, there are two down and the crowd is going crazy. They should. Fogarty has two strikeouts on only seven pitches.

The next hitter doesn't go down that easy. With a count of three balls and two strikes, he fouls off six straight pitches in shades of Richie Ashburn. The next one he swings at and misses, however, to end the ball game.

The scoreboard operator spells out YIPPEE on the message board. I think what a real clever fellow he is and then start looking forward to getting back to the hotel. It's been a long evening. Before I can get off the field, though, Drummond is giving me a few more well-chosen words about what I think is a very cut-and-dried play, but it's Drummond's frustration talking, not his mind.

Two A.M. back at the hotel. I am a very sound sleeper and I don't know how many times the phone by my bed rings before I answer it. It's the night clerk saying apologetically, "I'm very sorry to disturb you, Mr. Gorgon, but there's a gentleman here who wants to see you. He says it's urgent."

"What's his name?"

"Marvin Beal."

I groan. That damn Yankee reporter who brought me so much misery. "I won't see him."

"He says it's a matter of life and death, Mr. Gorgon."

I doubt it very much, but who can go back to sleep after a pronouncement like that? I wearily agree to see him.

Beal is a brave fellow, I must admit. He's a little guy about the size of a steeplechase jockey, and I stand six-three and have been told I look every bit as mean as is appropriate for an umpire in the Majors. Besides which I have reason to be very mad at him. Still, an umpire taking a swing at a newspaperman wouldn't sit any better with the Commissioner than a player doing the same thing. Remember the Bo Belinsky incident a few years back? Or more recently, Denny McLain and his icewater?

"Make it quick," I tell him.

"I can, Ed. One question: have you ever been a member

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of the Ku Klux Klan?"

I do a fast burn, like Edgar Kennedy at triple speed. "No, and I didn't let you come up here at two in the morning for an interview! Now what's so blamed important?"

"Take it easy, Ed," he says. "I want to help you. If you have a background in the Klan, it's best you reveal it now to me. I can have the story on the street by the time the police have even finished questioning you. Of course, it may mean you have to take up a new line of work, but still—"

"What the hell are you talkin' about?" I roar at him.

"I suppose I ought to let you in on what happened. That is, if you don't know already."

I don't answer. Just glare. But my murderous glare is not as effective on him as it is on ballplayers. This scribe seems mighty sure of himself.

"About an hour after the game tonight, Ed, there was a murder out at the stadium. Al Burlington. Do you know him?"

I can't place the name immediately, though I know I've heard it before.

"He's the guy that runs the scoreboard out at the stadium."

I nod. "I know him. A very slick and sneaky-looking guy. Moonlights at the stadium. Also works as a private detective. Not a very pleasant character."

"That's him. But his most lucrative vocation was neither private detective work nor scoreboard operating. He was a blackmailer."

"Oh? Do the police know this?"

"They'll be figuring it out very shortly, if they don't. Burlington was shot to death tonight in his booth at the stadium."

"Why was he still there so late after the game?"

"The cops figure he may have arranged to meet somebody."

"And do they know who shot him?"

"Not yet, but they'll be putting two and two together pretty fast. Now, Ed, I don't want you to think I'm accusing you of anything—"

"Me?"

"Yes. I'm not saying you shot him, but I have reason to think you'll be suspected."

"Why?" I'm holding my temper tight.

"Well, Burlington spent all his waking hours getting dirt on people. He got the job running the scoreboard, in my opinion, because he had something on Colonel Foley, the Grizzlies' owner."

"What?"

"Haven't found out yet, Ed, but I'll keep trying. Anyhow, if

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it were to come out that you were a KKK member, even if it were years ago, it might seriously jeopardize your career as an umpire, wouldn't it? Racial tensions being what they are?"

"We're back to the Klan again, are we? Look, Beal, I am not now and never have been one of the white-sheet set. I don't hold with their activities. And the only reason my racial attitudes have even been called into question is that damn story you wrote, quoting me out of context! And anyway, what's the Klan got to do with this?"

"Before Burlington died he left a message on the message board. He spelled out three letters: KKK."

"I see."

"The police have theorized that if the killer took the quickest route from Burlington's booth to the parking lot, he wouldn't even see the message board as he left, so he wouldn't know the incriminating message, if that's what it is, was there. And even if he did, there wouldn't be much he could do about it. So there it stood, way up over the field in giant letters, for the cops to see."

"Wouldn't the security guards have been some help in telling who left the stadium?"

"Bill Thomas, the watchman in that area, got hit over the head and was out for a few minutes. He's the one who found the body, but he doesn't have any idea who hit him."

"You seem to know the whole story, Beal. How do you guys get on top of things so fast?"

"Professional secret."

"With such a talent for gathering facts I wish you'd get out of the habit of writing fiction."

Beal grins. I can't get him mad. "I ought to resent such remarks, Ed."

"You would, if they weren't true. But if Burlington were as prolific a blackmailer as you say, there ought to be plenty of suspects. Right?"

"Sure, Ed. But there's that dying message—KKK."

"Points straight to me, huh?" I'm getting madder and madder. "Look, you sniveling yellow journalist! I'm not a Klansman and never was and for that reason there can't be any evidence against me. But I bet you could make it look that way, couldn't you, spelling it out just short of libel in your damn scandal sheet? Wouldn't surprise me if you were in partnership with Burlington in his blackmail racket."

He protests, still unruffled. "I just want to help, Ed."

I give him the thumb, the

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way I would to an irate manager who's gone too far. "Get outa here, little man!"

He does, but I don't go back to bed. I know the police will be coming soon, and they do.

Once it seemed that all cops were Irish. Now I'd swear they're mostly Latin American. Sergeant Rojas is a chunky little guy, just at the minimum height for a policeman I suppose, and he has the kind of penetrating eyes that would unnerve me if I had anything to hide. His English is perfect (that is, better than mine) but a slight shading of inflection underlines his ethnic background.

He asks me when I left the stadium and establishes that I have no alibi except for a twenty-minute period when I was having a late snack with the other umps. Rojas is just a guy doing his job, so when he brings up the same interpretation of KKK, probably planted in his head by my good buddy Marvin Beal, I don't get mad at him. I'm sure he can be reasoned with.

We go over the KKK jump, and I am relieved to see he regards Beal's version of it about as silly as I do. Still, I realize he'd see it in a new light if he found any evidence that I ever *had* been a Klansman; but, of course, there is none.

"How well did you know Burlington, Mr. Gorgon?"

"Only casually. I'll have to admit I was ignorant of his blackmailing exploits until Marvin Beal filled me in earlier tonight."

Rojas makes a face at the mention of Beal. "I'm glad to have that *hombre* out of my hair, Mr. Gorgon, except I'm worried about what he might be nosing into while I'm not watching him."

"I know what you mean. Sergeant, I've been thinking about this whole thing—thinking to save my own hide, to be perfectly truthful. That Beal would do anything to throw mud on me. I think he has a 'thing' about Southerners."

Rojas smiles tightly. "I know about prejudices, Mr. Gorgon."

"Anyway, I've come up with a possible line of inquiry for you to follow. It could be a dead end, but maybe not."

"Let's have it."

"Have you seen that book came out last year by Jim Bouton, called *Ball Four?*"

"I've heard of it. Didn't sit too well with the Commissioner's office, did it?"

"There's some stuff in there about ballplayers who cheat on their wives while they're on the road. Most people don't like to think the lads who participate in our National Pastime even

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know about sex and such unsavory matters. But such things do go on.

"It's a two-way street, though. There are baseball wives who have been known to indulge in extracurricular activities of their own while the husbands are away. Now if one such baseball wife was playing around with this unpleasant Burlington fellow, and the husband found out about it, that would be a motive for murder, wouldn't it?"

"Might."

"Now, Sergeant Rojas, I'm going to give you the name of a lady you might like to have a talk with. She's been known as the Mrs. Round Heels of New Hopton in local baseball circles for some time now, and supposedly her husband has been blissfully unaware of it. But you never know when the last to know might find out, do you?"

Sergeant Rojas nods. "I'll talk to the lady. It's just a possibility, but it's worth a try."

Then I explain to the sergeant why I think it might be more than just a possibility, and I give him the lady's name.

Sergeant Rojas is a fast worker. Later that same day an arrest is made in the murder of Al Burlington. I'm sitting in my hotel room two hours before game time, wondering what it'll be like in New Hopton Stadium that evening. The atmosphere is going to be pretty gloomy, I figure, and the team and what few curious spectators show up are going to be in a state of shock.

The phone rings.

"Hello."

"Ed, this is Marvin Beal," he says, like an old friend.

"Oh."

"Ed, Sergeant Rojas mentioned your name at the press conference today. Said you gave him the lead that broke the Burlington case."

"That's nice of him, but he did all the work."

Silence.

"You expect me to tell you all about it, don't you, Beal? You damn presumptuous Yankee. After all you've done to me in the past!"

"Ed, I'm coming to you with my hat in my hand. Let bygones be bygones."

"Okay, Beal, I'll meet the press in the lobby of this hotel in half an hour and tell all of you. No exclusives."

Umpires shouldn't give interviews too often, but now I've got half a dozen reporters with pencils poised, so at least one of them ought to get it right.

"I shouldn't have to figure

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this one out for a bunch of sportswriters. Every real baseball fan knows the meaning of the three letters Burlington put up on the message board. Those three letters combined with certain other facts that Sergeant Rojas probably has told you about—and if he hasn't I won't either—led me to a simple hypothesis. Sergeant Rojas investigated that hypothesis and bagged the murderer. Excuse me, he bagged a suspect, who is innocent till proved guilty."

"He confessed," says one of the assembled scribes.

"I still say suspect, and be sure you quote me right.

"As you should all know—no, scratch that out. I'm beyond expecting a sportswriter to know anything. In the official scoring of a baseball game, a strikeout is represented by the letter K. So three strikeouts in a row read KKK. And an hour before Burlington was shot, a pitcher for the Grizzlies accomplished the feat of striking out three men in a row. So the letters KKK did not refer to a night-riding organization from my part of the country but were simply a handy abbreviation for Mickey Fogarty—and how any baseball writer could miss that is beyond me!"

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THE PRISONER OF ZEMU ISLAND

by JOAN RICHTER

A needle of light pierced the white blaze of African sun and flickered high in the cloudless sky over Zemu Island. Ras Lazaar stood at the edge of the airfield, in the shade of a jacaranda tree, watching the gleaming splinter of steel sprout wings. A fusion of excitement and sadness held him, as he studied the plane's gradual descent. He had traveled to the mainland by boat many times, but he had never flown. He never would now. The new African government did not allow Indians to leave the island.

He pushed away the wave of self-pity. Unchecked it would engulf him in a deep sense of hopelessness.

Thirty passengers were on board the plane today—29 Germans on a tour of Africa, coming to spend the afternoon on Zemu Island, and one American woman traveling alone. Since Ras was the Director of Tourism they were all his responsibility, especially the American. The decision to grant her entry had not been reached without argument and threat. Except for newspapermen whose requests the new government automatically denied, it was a year since an American had sought to come to Zemu Island.

"If she is not what she says she is—if she brings trouble to the New Republic of Zemu Island—you, *Indian*, will pay for it!" Prime Minister Masaka's finger had pointed like a gun at Ras's head, firing the abbreviated Swahili with the slur of

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ethnic superiority. Only Ras's hatred of Masaka exceeded his fear.

When the plane touched the ground and streaked across the far runway, Ras stepped out of the shade of the tree. His stride showed only a bare trace of stiffness from the now year-old wound. He was taller than the average Indian, with the traditional olive skin and gleaming black hair. His frame was held together by pliant muscles developed by years of tennis and swimming. Since the political coup he had done neither, but at 23 his body did not show the year's absence from exercise. His mind, too, had survived the trauma of the two-day revolution in which the Indian population of Zemu Island had been decimated.

He had stopped asking why he had lived when so many had died, what instinct had sent him to the ground at the unfamiliar sound of gunfire, by what lucky accident a bullet had struck his leg and not his heart. The Africans had not killed him afterward, when they found him wounded and unconscious; instead they had put him in the care of the Cuban doctors who had come with the revolutionary force. Later when he was given the position of Director of Tourism he began to understand. The Africans needed him—he could read and write both Swahili and English.

It seemed without reason that Masaka should see a threat in the visit of the young American schoolteacher. Yet the attitude was in keeping with the Prime Minister's frequent rages and bursts of irrationality. The pressures of ruling a country were heavy on a man, even when he had the support of his people. Masaka had had that support for only a short time. Suspicion had quickly eaten at the edges of black unity when word spread that the revolution had been the organized effort of a foreign power which had chosen Masaka as its island leader, and not the spontaneous rebellion of Africans against a repressive Indian government.

Sober Africans began to ask questions. Some had begun to demand answers. Yukano was one of them.

Differences between Masaka and Yukano were evident even physically. Masaka was six feet tall, with a round head and enormous hands that were forever washing one another. Yukano was slight with a thin face and narrow shoulders, and he spoke softly.

At a meeting where Masaka had announced his opposition to the American teacher's visit, Yukano had risen and talked

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convincingly of Zemu Island's need to reinstate tourism as a source of revenue and prestige. Many were stirred by this argument, but others were unconvinced until Yukano spoke again. "The American June Hastings asks to come not just as a tourist but as a scientist interested in Zemu Island's marine life. Do you recall the prestige that came to Tanganyika when Dr. Louis Leakey made his excavations at Oldavai Gorge and found evidence of prehistoric man? How do we know what there is to be found in the waters of Zemu Island?"

Masaka had acceded to the majority, but Ras knew it was a defeat the Prime Minister was not likely to forget. Ras worried about the kind of action Masaka would take to soothe his wounded pride.

The plane came to a stop and the airfield sprouted life. Africans in ragged shorts and bare feet appeared to unload baggage. Airport officials of the same skin color, wearing starched uniforms and hats decorated with gold braid, stood at attention to some unseen authority. The sun streamed down and the concrete airfield glistened with the running of dry rivers and shimmering pools.

The first person to disembark was the German tour leader with whom Ras shook hands. "Lunch is waiting for your group at the Manga Hotel," Ras said. "Afterwards the drivers will take you on a tour of the island." The balding pink-cheeked man mopped his forehead and managed a smile, then went off to tend his flock.

Ras's attention steadied on the young woman who appeared in the plane's doorway. A border of embroidery fluttered at the hem of her dress, the saffron-pink color of a ripe pomalo. A graceful sweep of bronze hair fell across her cheek. He was struck by the expression of expectancy in her eyes as she scanned the horizon of palm trees, then started down the steps.

"June Hastings?" he asked when she reached him.

She hesitated. "Yes."

"I am Rashid Lazaar. We have corresponded. I am with the ministry of tourism."

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Lazaar." She offered her hand. "Thank you for arranging for my entry permit."

"My pleasure," he said, a phrase he realized he had not used with any real meaning in a long time. "I think if we go directly to immigration we will save time."

She fell in step beside him. "What about my luggage? Your

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customs people will want to check that."

"That will be delivered to another place—we must go there after we have finished here."

Though her eyes were veiled by sunglasses he could see that they were a pale brown, almost golden. There was a question in them. Her bronze head tossed. "Does someone from your office always meet a new arrival?"

"It is the policy of the new government."

"But I must be someone special to be entitled to the Director of Tourism himself."

The mischief in her voice was clear. It surprised him and reminded him of his sisters, and their playful jibes.

"You *are* special, Miss Hastings. You have not only chosen to visit Zemu Island, you have come for an unusual purpose. Zemu women and children have gathered shells for years and made necklaces of them, but no one has ever thought them of scientific interest."

"Maybe it's time someone did."

"Some in the government are doubtful, others are puzzled. Others still have suggested that you will give Zemu Island prominence by discovering something as important as what Dr. Leakey found at Oldavai Gorge."

She stopped and stared at him. "They don't really think that?"

"It is what has been said."

"By whom?"

Ras shrugged. "A man named Yukano." The name would mean nothing to her—Yukano had become prominent in island politics only a short time ago. But Ras thought he saw a flicker of recognition move across her face. "Have you heard of him?"

"The name sounds familiar, but maybe it's my Western ear. Even now many African names still sound alike to me."

He nodded, assuming she was referring to the last two years she had been teaching school in Kenya. "It is a funny thing. I have the same difficulties with British names—like your own. But Indian names are hard for Westerners, I think."

"Ignorance contributes to the confusion. People of one culture imagine those of another are all alike. Masaka and Yukano, for example. To a person unfamiliar with Africa they simply are both Africans. No thought is given to the possibility of great differences between them, that they are of different tribes and different persuasions—totally different personalities."

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Her voice lowered as they approached the Immigration Building and fell silent when they reached the steps. Ras did not speak either, but his mind was churning. She was well informed, typical of the emancipated American women he had read about. He must be careful not to be guilty of the very thing she had just described. She was more than simply an American. She was an individual who had chosen to come to visit Zemu Island for a special reason. What that reason was he suspected he had yet to find out.

The immigration check was routine, even to the insolence of the African clerk who looked at Ras and yawned widely. In the past year Ras had learned to ignore such petty insults, but with the young woman at his side he found it difficult to hold back a rebuke. He was glad when they were outside again and he could lead her to the car he had left parked near the jacaranda tree. "Your luggage is being delivered to a building at the other end of the airport—it is just a minute's drive."

As he helped her into the front seat he thought of warning her that this would be no ordinary custom's check. Two of the Prime Minister's own men would be in the banda and their instructions were to go through her belongings with exactness. If they found something they did not like, she would be put on the next plane leaving Zemu Island.

Ras decided to say nothing. A warning would serve no purpose but to alarm her. He hoped her luggage cleared. He wanted her to stay. There was very little he had wanted so much in a long time.

Perhaps he would even take her to Pwani Pwani—he had not been back since the day the guns had fired. He had thought he could never return, to walk over those sands where his mother and his sisters and the girl he had loved had played ball and gathered shells. How pretty they had looked, strolling along the beach, their brilliantly colored saris catching the breeze, like butterflies in flight. Sunday after Sunday they had gone to picnic at Pwani Pwani. One Sunday all of them had died . . .

"Tell me about the Manga Hotel," he heard June Hastings say. "Is it as nice as it used to be?"

He glanced at her quickly, torn from his reverie. "You know it?"

"I heard of it from someone who had been there years ago when the Norberts owned it. They aren't still here, are they?"

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Ras smiled. Anyone who had stayed at the Manga would remember the Norberts. "They're still here. They run the hotel for the government now." He was certain she was aware that the new regime had confiscated all private lands and possessions. "They have kept things up. It is a handsome building, white stone and coral, built around a courtyard that is always in bloom."

Purposely he did not mention the door. For some reason he wanted her to see it for herself, unprompted. He was tempted to add that a building, no matter how beautiful, did not make a hotel—only guests could give it life. There had been no guests for a year. The few boarders were foreign technicians who had come in the wake of the revolution, from Cuba and Russia and China. They had come to work, not to play. The lanterns that had always hung in the flame trees, lighting the terrace on Saturday nights, had not been lit in a year.

They had reached the end of the concrete runway where a wall of tropical forest faced them. Ras found the narrow dirt track that led to the banda and parked beside a car already there. It was Masaka's car. His heartbeat quickened, but in a moment resumed its even beat. How else would the two men assigned to check her luggage get to the airport, if not by car? But it was not like Masaka to let anyone use his.

The shade of the trees was deep and blinding after the brightness of the sun. Inside the banda it seemed darker still. Two Africans in Army uniforms stood behind a table on which her luggage lay—a blue suitcase and one small metal trunk. Their black faces shone in the glow from a pressure lamp whose eerie light did not reach into the far corner to make distinguishable the figure standing there. But a familiar movement of hands washing one another told Ras who it was. A cold stillness touched his heart and did not go away.

June Hastings unlocked the blue suitcase, and the two men began to paw through the layers of pastel-colored clothes, looking into pockets, peering into the toes of shoes. Before opening the metal trunk she removed her sunglasses and put them in her purse. The glance with which she touched Ras was fleeting, but in the strange light her eyes looked to him like warm gold. Once before he had known someone with eyes of that color—in Dar es Salaam.

Several times he had gone there by dhow with his father, sailing first to Zanzibar and on

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to what was then Tanganyika. They would always stay two days—one to sell the copra they had brought from their plantation, another to visit a man named Benji, an old friend of his father. The two men would sit together in the shade of a mango tree, sipping tea, their voices hushed, their heads bent in serious talk. On the other side of the garden Ras would play with Benji's youngest son, named after his father. They drank orange fanta and stuffed themselves with sweet cakes and played marbles. Sometimes the girl, who lived in the house on the other side of the garden wall, would join them. Though she was the same age as they, rarely could she beat them in a marble game. Her hair was the color of dark honey, her eyes pale gold.

Each time they left Benji's house the packet of money his father had received from the sale of the copra would be smaller than when he had first received it, but the expression on his father's face would say that things had gone as he had wished. Ras was always tempted to ask what business his father had with Benji that took so much money, but he did not, knowing that when his father wanted him to know he would tell him. That time came. "Some day things will not be good on Zemu Island and you and your mother and your sisters will have to leave. Benji is sending money for me to a bank in Switzerland. It is in my name and in yours. Should something ever happen to me, you will know what to do." Ras remembered how frightened those words had made him, and how little he had understood their full meaning.

Now he understood, but what good did it do? Those careful plans his father had made in Dar es Salaam, under the mango tree, while the sound of marbles clinked in the warm still air, had died on the beach at Pwani Pwani . . .

June Hastings turned the key in the lock and lifted the lid of the metal trunk. The two Army men looked up from the blue suitcase and turned to stare at the contents of the trunk, their eyes growing round and then narrow. They leaned closer and then straightened, muttering in Swahili to each other and to the man in the corner of the room.

Masaka left the shadowed security of the banda wall and moved to the table. She looked up but made no sign that his presence was a surprise to her. Ras felt his breath catch as he wondered if she knew who Masaka was.

The lid of the trunk held a collection of tools: files, tweez-

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ers, knives, hooks, brushes, a small rake and shovel. In the bottom of the trunk was a roll of netting, a half dozen litre-sized bottles filled with liquids, and several dozen clear plastic boxes of assorted sizes, separated by layers of cotton wool.

She spoke in a quiet fluent Swahili that surprised them all. "I have come to Zemu Island to gather specimens of seashells. These are tools I need to find the shells and to clean them." Her hand passed lightly over the contents of the lid and then moved to the items in the lower section. "The large bottles contain cleaning solutions—clorox, alcohol, vinegar, formaldehyde. These plastic boxes are for the shells after they have been cleaned. Each will be wrapped in a piece of cotton, so it will not be crushed."

She had turned in the course of her explanation so that her glance touched each of them—the two Army men, Ras, and Masaka. Ras found it difficult to hide the rush of admiration he felt for her intuition. She might have guessed that Masaka would not understand a lengthy stream of English, but she could not have known how angry he would have become if his ignorance were revealed.

She withdrew a small blue-bound book from the trunk, with a colored photograph of shells on its cover. Ras read the title: *Shells of the East African Coast.* She opened to several pages. Each had some text accompanying the photograph of a shell.

"This book describes shells found along the coast of East Africa. I would like to do the same thing about shells in the waters of Zemu Island."

One of Masaka's large hands reached out for the book. He looked at its cover and turned to look inside. He snapped the book shut and thrust it at her. "You will make a book like this about Zemu Island?"

"I would like to."

"Where did you learn to speak Swahili?"

"In Kenya. I taught English in a school north of Nairobi. My pupils knew their own tribal languages and Swahili. I learned Swahili so that I could teach them English."

Masaka's hands had begun moving one over the other. Ras saw something building in him, but he did not know what it was, or its cause. His concern stirred. When Masaka spoke again, it would not be with an even voice, but with the beginning of some irrational anger. How would the girl react?

"Kenya has declared Swahili its national language! Why do

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they still teach English?"

Something in Masaka's expression had evidently prepared her for the attack. She only frowned thoughtfully. "English is just one of many subjects taught in Kenyan schools, like arithmetic and history and geography."

Masaka stared at her and then his face closed over. He motioned to the two men standing mute behind the table. The three of them marched out the door.

Ras stared through the open doorway after them. He was not certain whether to feel relief or worry. It was not like Masaka to give way so easily.

"Can we leave now?" Her voice took him from his thoughts.

"Yes, we can go," he said slowly, unable to free himself of the uneasiness he felt.

"Let's hurry then." She smiled at him, a mischievous smile. "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse!"

Her spirit was contagious. He grinned. "You will insult the Norberts with that kind of talk!" They were both suddenly laughing and he felt strangely free. He had to remind himself that his position had not changed. He was still a prisoner on Zemu Island. But the gloom of that realization was not as great as it usually was.

They put her suitcase and trunk into the compartment of his car. When they were driving off he turned to her and asked, "Did you know who he was?"

"Masaka? Not right away. It was so dark at first. After the revolution there were lots of photographs of him in newspapers and magazines, standing on the veranda of the old Sultan's palace with the new flag draped over the railing. I was scared stiff when I realized who he was."

"You did not show it."

"I felt it. I've never had a head of state come to the airport and check my luggage before."

"I told you that you were someone special."

"You didn't say *that* special." She leaned back, resting her head against the seat. "Ras, are we going to be seeing a lot of Masaka?"

The road from the airport to the Manga Hotel was narrow. He was behind a donkey cart laden with bananas, driving slowly. It was easy to turn and look at her. She had called him Ras, not Rashid. There were some things about her that were indeed puzzling—the easy comfort he felt, the strange sense of the familiar.

He shrugged. "I cannot speak for Masaka. He is not the most predictable of men."

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"Or the most stable. I heard that on the mainland, but I thought it was just gossip, wishful rumor. But it's not. That man is cracking up. I'm not sure it's anything to rejoice about. Zemu Island could be in for a lot of trouble with someone like him ruling."

"That is very dangerous talk."

"And I should know better. You might turn the car around and head straight back to the airport. Please don't. I'd be so disappointed. I've wanted to visit Zemu Island for a long time. I never thought I'd get the chance. It's a long way from Boston."

"Is that where you come from?"

"It's my mother's home. We went there to live after my father died ten years ago. He was a British doctor. We traveled a lot when I was small."

"You had been to Africa then—before the last two years teaching in Kenya?"

"Yes," was all she said.

The last turn brought them into the center of Zemu town with its narrow Arab alleys that twisted and cut back on each other. To a stranger they were a mysterious labyrinth, but to Ras they were home.

Some of the old pride stirred in him as he stopped the car in front of the hotel and waited for her reaction. The chalk-white walls appeared almost opalescent in the brilliance of the noonday sun. At intervals bougainvillaea clung and tumbled in scarlet cascades. The stairway entrance ascended to a wide arch embracing a massive double door carved of ebony. Spikes of polished brass were embedded in the oiled wood and gleamed in the equatorial sunlight.

She was silent beside him, staring, her profile still. After a while she turned. Her eyes were shining. "It's magnificent. I've never seen anything like it. And you were right—it would take an elephant to batter that door down."

He stared at her. "An elephant—I—"

Her soft brown-gold eyes gleamed with mischief. "You don't remember? How absolutely horrid of you!"

How absolutely horrid of you! Where had he heard those words?

Then he heard the clink of glass against glass. He saw the blue marble fly from his hand, hit the white one swirled with red, and split it in two. *How absolutely horrid of you!* she had cried, stamping her foot and running off, disappearing behind the garden wall.

The great double door swung

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open, splashing reflections of sun onto their faces. An eager young African in a starched white uniform and red velour fez came down the steps and opened the car door on her side. "*Jambo, Memsab. Jambo, Bwana.* Welcome to Manga Hotel."

Winky Norbert was waiting for them at the desk inside. He shook Ras's hand and smiled at the pretty girl with him. His wiry mustache twitched. "Good you didn't get here a while ago. Sheer bedlam with that tour. Couldn't please one of them, no less the lot. If they can't give Zemu more than four hours I'd rather they stayed away."

"That'll do with the complaining, Winky." Margaret Norbert appeared. "You know very well you loved every minute of it. You haven't been so chipper since the last tour. Twenty-nine lunches are twenty-nine lunches. Makes me feel we're still running a hotel."

She turned to June with a smile that deepened the wrinkles around her mouth and eyes. At 55 she was still an attractive woman. "Welcome to the Manga. I don't have to guess who you are. You're June Hastings, our first real guest in a long time."

June smiled. "Thank you. It's as lovely here as I heard it would be. Is there any chance you've given me a room overlooking the courtyard?"

"Take your pick. You can have one next to the Cubans or across from the Russians. The Chinese prefer the hotel down the street."

Winky patted his wife's arm. "Stop twigging the girl, Maggie." Then looking at June, "We've given you a second-floor room that looks right out onto a forest of bougainvillaea. I think you'll like it."

The road to Pwani Pwani wound along the edge of coconut plantations and through the ripening groves of clove trees. The warm humid air was heavy with the fragrance of an earlier crop, already harvested and drying in the sun. June had changed into a short blue dress that bared her suntanned arms. She was leaning back against the seat, her hair blowing in the breeze. It was the first time they had been alone since their arrival at the hotel

"You've had time to remember," she said.

"I'd never forgotten. But it was better to pretend. If I had allowed myself to think, I could not have let you come. This way it has happened without my really knowing."

"It's that bad here then?"

"Why have you come?"

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"Benji sent me."

"Benji? Benji died three years ago."

"I'm talking about Benji the son."

Ras thought of the small boy with the dark eyes with whom he had shot marbles and drunk orange fanta and gorged himself on sweet cakes—he was a man now. The last time Ras had been to Dar es Salaam young Benji had been at school in England.

"Where is Benji now?"

"I saw him in Nairobi, but he was leaving for New York."

Nairobi—New York—and he could not even go to Zanzibar. "Benji sent you. Why?"

"To find out what is happening on Zemu Island. No one on the outside really knows. Only a little has gotten out. I wasn't honest with you when I said I'd not heard of Yukano—I have heard of him. Some people think he is the man who should be ruling Zemu Island instead of Masaka. He would allow the British to return. He would seek American aid, not only Communist."

"What would he do for the Indians? Give them back their lives?" He'd spoken so bitterly that he knew she could make no reply. "Benji has a plan?" he asked softly.

"Not just Benji alone. There are others. But they need someone they can count on in Zemu. Benji wants to know if you will help."

"In what way? To make Yukano head of Zemu Island?"

"You mean he is an African," she said quietly.

He felt the bite of her words, the accusation in them and the challenge. She was no stranger to East African politics. She knew the deep animus that lay between African and Indian. She knew the tumult and bloodshed that had thrust the African into power. For those who had been born to the old way it would never be easy to accept black authority; but to fight it, or pretend that was not the way the tide ran, would be stupid.

"I know the differences between men," he said. "There is little likeness between Masaka and Yukano except for the color of their skin. Zemu will rot under the rule of a man like Masaka. I do not know that it will ever flourish as it once did, but with someone like Yukano there would at least be a chance." He fell silent.

"But how?" he asked after a while. "It would not be enough merely to get rid of Masaka. They would only put someone else like him in his place. And it would be dangerous—more dangerous than you can imagine. Masaka may be stupid,

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but those behind him are not. I do not think it was his own intelligence that made him suspicious of your visit. He was warned."

She smiled mischievously. "But after today no one will be suspicious."

"What makes you say so?"

"Today we are going shell gathering—and we'll be watched. After they see all the trouble we go to to get a few shells they will be convinced that shells are the sole reason for my visit."

"Then it is not a pretence?"

"It is, and it isn't. Marine biology is my field. I will write a book about the shells I find on Zemu Island. It will be published and copies will be sent to the government here. If any doubt over the purpose of my visit still lingers, it will disappear when copies of the book arrive. Yukano went a bit overboard when he talked of Oldavai Gorge—Africans are impressed by such things. They are impressed by books even when they can't read them.

"But Masaka will be reassured—and so will the Cubans and the Russians. Tours from Western nations will begin to come to Zemu Island and word will spread that Zemu Island is a lovely place. The government will become complacent and think that people have forgotten how Masaka came into power. It will assume there is no one interested enough in the welfare of this small piece of land floating in the Indian Ocean to plan a counterrevolution."

"Those are large words," he said. "The idea is larger still. You are talking about a long time—many months, perhaps years."

"I don't think Benji or the others involved with him have any illusions that it will be easy, that it will not take months of careful planning. They also know they cannot do it without help from someone here on the island—from you. Your position as Director of Tourism allows you to receive and send letters, a privilege others on Zemu are denied. It is a ready means of communication which cannot be duplicated with anyone else here."

"But every letter I receive or write is censored. They are not as naive as you think."

She shook her head. "I know. We would use a code."

He listened to her unfold a plan that could not work without him. It was a mad plan that had greater chance of failure than of success—but it offered hope, some hope. Ras realized that until she had come he had had no hope, no hope at all.

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They had almost reached the place where he should turn off onto a narrow track that would take them to Pwani Pwani. He had slowed down, looking for it. It would be grown over now—perhaps they would have to leave the car and walk in—it would be difficult with the metal trunk. Ah, there it was—the place marked by a dead tree. The growth was not so thick that he could not drive through part of the way.

"Close your window so you will not get scratched," he said, rolling up his own. Branches strung with thorny vines and moss arched across the once open path. The perfume of ripening guavas had drifted into the car and touched his mind with memory—he had been picking guavas when the first shot came. Other shots followed, the bullets skipping like footsteps across the sand. Like dolls, his mother and the girls had fallen, brilliant piles of crumpled saris on the sand. Then his father, like a dervish, spinning, falling, coughing, dying on the sand. Ras was flattened in the underbrush of vines, the guavas he had picked and put in the front of his shirt squashed and wet and oozing against his chest, warm from the sun, warm like the blood in which his father lay. Pain exploded in his leg. Blackness passed over him but in his unconsciousness he strained to remember the familiar face among the bearded strangers, the African whose gun had aimed and with lust had killed—Masaka . . .

His hands were clenched around the steering wheel, whitening his knuckles and making the muscles of his forearms bulge. He stared through the windshield at the beach, at winter glimmering through the suddenly denser tangle of green. He stopped the car, got out, and reached under the seat for the *panga* he kept there. The scent of guavas filled his nostrils as he struck at the vines that choked the path. The broad blade sliced through the ropy lengths as if they were bits of string. Sap oozed and trickled over his hands and arms.

When the path was clear, his arms fell to his sides, the point of the *panga* stuck in the sand beside his foot. His chest heaving, he turned and saw her standing by the car, watching him with her soft golden eyes, questioning, but not asking.

"We always came here to Pwani Pwani—my family. It was our special place. They all died here that first day of the revolution. I was picking guavas. They were walking along the sand. I have not been

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back, not until today." His dark eyes looked deep into hers. "It is time. I am ready."

She smiled gently and held out her hand. "Let's go then. There is lots to do."

They each took a handle of the metal trunk and carried it onto the beach where they placed it in the shade of a palm tree. He left her to open it while he returned for the two buckets she had borrowed from the Norberts.

Along the way he glanced on both sides into the dense tropical growth for a sign of anyone hiding there. They would be watched, but they would never know by whom or by how many. Once before the forest had camouflaged the presence of the enemy.

He started back toward the beach, carrying the buckets. He spied the tree where he had left her and saw the trunk as it had been, unopened. Then he saw her arm raised in the water, waving to him, splashing. He heard her voice and her laughter. He tore off his clothes and went racing into the waves. In a few moments he was shoveling and she was using the rake.

"Here's a beauty," she cried. "Look at it." She held a brown and white spiraled shell in the palm of her hand.

"There must be hundreds of them just like that all over the beach."

"They'd be chipped or cracked. The shells I take back must be perfect." She dropped it into the bucket of formaldehyde solution and reached for a notebook. "Speckled Turret Shell," she said aloud, "otherwise known as *Terebra oculata.*"

"What about this one?" he said, extending his hand. She reached for it without looking.

"You don't take me seriously at all!" He could almost see her foot stamp.

"Oh, but I do," he said, tossing the small stone away and giving her a handful of shells he had been saving.

She grinned at him, and then set about recording the names in her notebook.

When the buckets were almost full she rose. "I want to set some traps in the rocks close to shore. Some shells are nocturnal. It won't take long. Then we can swim until the sun goes down, and come back tomorrow."

She cut squares from the roll of netting that had been in the trunk and with some thin wire gathered them into makeshift baskets. A small piece of the meat from the Norberts' kitchen served as bait. They laid the traps together, anchoring them with small stones. As they

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worked, their heads were close, almost touching. She spoke softly. "They're watching, I know. But they are stupid—we could be setting mines and they wouldn't know. Some day we will."

She looked up and her eyes held his for a moment, the expression in them intent and serious. Then in the next instant her head tossed and she was running into the water.

The sun was low in the sky, a fiery orange ball that lit the surface of the transparent pale-green sea with strands of orange and gold. Between the breaking waves the water flowed like the soft folds of an iridescent sari. Ras raced after her and dove into the water, feeling the salt of it sting his eyes, blurring the memory that had begun of a girl he had once loved, a girl who had worn a sari of green threaded with bronze and gold on the last day of her life.

He swam alongside her. "Can you swim to those rocks out there? At the last one there is a deep pool and a cavern. If the light is right it is a wonderful sight."

Drops of water clinging to her eyelashes sparkled and flew away when she nodded and began an easy stroke beside him.

It was a long time since he'd made the dive and he wanted to be certain the passage was still clear, certain no rock had dislodged itself. He had warned her to let him lead the way. Her hand was in his as they swam underwater toward an archway of rock leading under a ledge in the rock ceiling.

It was the purple coral he wanted her to see, the sea anemones and the swaying ferns whose undulations were said to have teased love-starved sailors into thinking they were mermaids. It was a perfect time, the sun and tide were just right. There was a small space where they could rise to the surface and rest before they dove again.

"I've never seen purple coral before," she said.

"It is purple only in the water. It turns brown when it is in the air."

He was ready to dive again, anxious to show her more.

"Wait, Ras. The sun will set soon. This is a good place to talk. No one can hear us, no one can see. There are other things you must know—about Yukano and the money that is yours in Switzerland—and the code. It's important that you know the code right away. Should anything happen to me, then you could still get in touch with Benji."

"Nothing will happen to you."

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She grinned. "I could drown."

He shook his head. "You swim too well." He smiled to himself, measuring the differences between them. She thought of setting mines in the sea and he saw saris in the sea. He wanted to show her the mysteries of an underwater grotto he had explored as a child and she wanted to plan a revolution. "This is not the place. The opening in the rocks above us is like a horn and our words would be carried across the island."

She looked at him, her eyes doubtful, but he knew she could not take the chance. She needed him. Benji needed him. He would be their tool, as Masaka had been the tool of the Cubans. Was there a difference? Would the people of Zemu Island feel any more loyalty to the man whom counterrevolutionaries would put in the Sultan's palace than they did to Masaka? How many people would die?—Africans this time.

Despite his questions he knew he would do what Benji asked. Not because he wanted revenge, or because success of the counterrevolution would make him free, but because it gave him hope. And without hope no man can live and stay whole.

He took her hand, wishing he could explain what her coming to Zemu Island meant to him. But even if he were able to say it, he was afraid she would think him sentimental and not ready for the task that lay ahead of him.

"We have time for one more dive and then we must go while there is still light."

They swam toward the shore in the sun's last golden path. In minutes night would fall. They left the water and felt the evening air was cool. She began to run, her wet hair streaming, calling to him, laughing, "Catch me if you can!"

A breeze stirred and furled the water's waves. Dark leaves fluttered and shadows moved at the forest's edge. Bearded men who looked like trees advanced across the sand. As if in a nightmare he stood immobile.

He heard shots, her one sharp cry, but he looked away so as not to see her body lying crumpled on the sand.

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a NEW crime-detective story by

AVRAM DAVIDSON

The kind of story in which Avram Davidson is at his most gentle and charming best . . . about two old spinster-sisters who live in Brooklyn, in a house at the corner of Upshurr and Huyk Streets, and the sisters and their house are from a long-dead-and-gone era—except that it can still happen in Brooklyn . . .

SUMMON THE WATCH!

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

If you want to see New York as New York used to look, there is no point in looking around Manhattan, the only place which practices auto-cannibalism as a matter of policy. The few—the very few—blocks of old buildings which survive on Minuit's island have, for the most part, become slums. Old New York, however, does survive, but in the sister-borough.

Upshurr Street in Brooklyn is not very long, and the legend that it is easy to get lost in Brooklyn is, unfortunately, all too true. Perhaps that is why so much that is old and good still survives in Brooklyn—perhaps the wreckers have merely been unable to find their way, and, finally baffled, have given up and retreated to destroy yet more areas across the East River.

The two men who arrived at the house at the corner of Upshurr and Huyk Streets one winter afternoon surveyed it with interest, despite the cold. It was a well-kept building in the Georgian style, three stories high, and surrounded by garden. The smaller trees and bushes were carefully muffled in burlap. The two men mounted the steps.

"Where's the bell?" one of them asked, after fumbling with his gloved hand.

The other man shifted a camera he was carrying, bent over, and looked. He straight-

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ened up and shrugged. "Ain't none. Try that doojigger there," he said.

The knocker—in the form of a lion's head with a long tongue—was banged a few times. The two men waited, stamped their feet, blew out vapor, rubbed their noses. Then the door was opened by a short heavy old woman with long gray ringlets clustering around her broad pink face. "Come in," she urged. "Come in."

"Miss Vanderhooft?" the first man asked. The old woman nodded vigorously, setting the ringlets to boucing like springs. "My name is—"

"Your name will still be the same if you come inside," she said crisply. They entered, she shut the door. The house was warm, and well-furnished in the style of the early Nineteenth Century.

"My name—" the man began again.

"*My* name is Sapphira Vanderhooft," the old woman said. "My sister, being elder, ought properly to be addressed only as 'Miss Vanderhooft,' but since this fact seems to have passed out of all common knowledge, you may address her as Miss Isabella—come along, come along," she urged, gesturing them to precede her; "and me, as Miss Sapphira."

They found themselves in the living room, or parlor. A coal fire burned in the high basket-grate. A few candles shed a soft light which melted into the ruddy glow from the fireplace. Seated in an upright chair was a second old woman, tall and spare, with her white hair parted in the center and drawn back.

"You will excuse me if I do not rise," she said, nodding to them, and making a slight gesture with an ivory-headed cane. Embroidery-work, hooped and needled, lay in her lap.

"This is my sister," said Miss Sapphira. "Isabella, these gentlemen are from the newspaper. That is, I *hope* that they are gentlemen," she added.

"And I hope that they are from the press," Miss Isabella said. "Have you seen identification, sister? If you are on another errand—soliciting contributions, for example—you won't get any," she went on, as the younger of the two men fumbled in his pocket. "Mr. Caldwell, at the Trust Company, takes care of all that for us. Hmm. What is this?" She examined the card offered her. "It has last year's date on it; how is that?"

The man said that the card's validity ran from April to April, and—as Miss Isabella nodded, and handed it back to him—he

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at last managed to get out the information that his name was Dandridge and that his photographer-companion was called Goltz.

"Let me have your great-coats," Miss Sapphira said. "There's no need for you to stand, we aren't royalty. Have whatever chairs you like, but the settle is mine."

Mr. Dandridge, who was thirtyish and thin, and Mr. Goltz, who was fortyish and squat, looked around the cozy, quaintly furnished room.

Miss Isabella broke the momentary silence. "If you've come to do a sensational article for the penny press, young man, the point cannot be too strongly emphasized that we are *not* recluses," she said.

"Certainly not," agreed Miss Sapphira. "The fact that we receive *you* is—or should be—proof of *that.*"

Dandridge said, "Well—"

"After that unfortunate affair of the Collier brothers," Miss Isabella swept on, "there was a reporter here from the Brooklyn *Eagle*, and he at once conceded that there was no similarity at all."

"None whatsoever," said Miss Sapphira. "We knew Homer and Langley when they were very young. The trouble with them was simply that they were spoiled. Aren't you going to say anything for yourself?" she demanded of Mr. Dandridge.

He smiled. Goltz looked bored. "I might begin by saying that my paper isn't a sensational one—and that it's been many years since any newspaper sold for a penny."

The older Miss Vanderhooft sniffed. "Well, it has been many years since we have cared to purchase one," she said. "So your information is of no particular use."

"Also," Goltz growled, "the *Eagle* is outa business."

For a moment the sisters were startled. Then they regained their aplomb. "Ah, well," said Miss Isabella, "it doesn't signify."

Dandridge looked down from a portrait labeled "General J. Abram Garfield." "Our editor thought it would be of interest to the readers to see how the calm and gracious life of another day is still being kept up amidst the hustle and—and—" he stumbled, hesitated.

The sisters smiled. "We are, I suppose, old-fashioned, to be sure," said Miss Isabella, "but we will not be shocked if you say the word 'bustle.' Silly fashion, we always thought. And our dear Papa used always to say that the garments Mrs. Amelia Bloomer was con-

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demned for wearing were not so very much sillier than the ones she was condemned for *not* wearing."

Miss Sapphira said that she had put the kettle on. "It will sing, presently, and then we shall have tea. Would you like tea? Capital."

Her sister picked up the hoop and took the needle in her fingers. She looked at the reporter, nodded to him encouragingly. Miss Sapphira, on the settle, slid her hand into her pocket, slipped out a tiny silver box and—when she thought no one was looking—hurriedly took a pinch of snuff.

"Well, now that we are agreed that you are not recluses," Dandridge said, "may I ask if it is true that you have no radio, telephone or television?"

The younger sister said that it was true. Such devices, she explained, as she might to a child, exuded a malign magnetical influence. Indeed, if it were not for their dear brother's insistence, they would never have allowed the electrical incandescent lamps to be installed. He was dead, poor Cornelius, and they now lived quite alone.

No servants? Ah, that *was* a problem, wasn't it? Well, Emma came in thrice a week to clean—not today, being Monday, but on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. She did the shopping. The sisters would endorse the bills and send them to Mr. Caldwell at the Trust Company, who mailed checks to the merchants. In clement weather the two sisters often walked to the end of the block and back; no further.

To church? No, no longer, but of course they always had evening prayers, and on Sundays they took turns reading sermons—one of Dr. Talmage's or, sometimes, one of the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher's. They did not, they assured Dandridge, believe a *word* of that dreadful scandal.

"Was there a scandal about him?" asked Mr. Dandridge. "I didn't know that."

The sisters exchanged gratified glances. "You see, Sapphira," Miss Isabella said. "I *told* you it would die down in time!"

"And have you no fears about living alone like this?"

Certainly not. Why should they have? It was a respectable neighborhood. The police always tried the doors at night—not that it was really necessary.

Dandridge cleared his throat. "Now—I don't mean to ask personal questions—but there seems to be a sort of, ah, legend, to the effect that a large

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treasure is hidden on the premises . . ." He tapered off with a chuckle.

"Treasure?" asked Miss Isabella, looking at Miss Sapphira.

"Treasure?" asked Miss Sapphira, looking at Miss Isabella.

"No," they said simultaneously. Then, "Do you suppose, sister, that the young man could be referring to the gold"—the photographer, for the first time, looked interested—"which dear Papa brought here following the panic of '73?" suggested Miss Isabella.

"Are you?" asked Miss Sapphira. The reporter nodded.

Miss Sapphira said, "Well, well. It isn't here any longer. No. We have *long* since turned it over to the government. Now, when was it? Nineteen twenty-three? Nineteen thirty-three?"

"Usurpation!" cried Miss Isabella, thumping her stick on the floor. A faint pink suffused the pallor of her cheeks. "Usurpation and confiscation—though I suppose we could expect little better, with the Republicans in office."

Miss Sapphira, for her part, brushed aside Dandridge's comment that the Democrats were in office at the time privately owned gold was called in. Dear Grandpapa Vanderhooft, she told him, had said often enough that the nation's fiscal policy had never been sound since the Whigs went out of power. And the two old women nodded soberly at this sage, though melancholy advice.

Miss Isabella poured the tea, Miss Sapphira passed around the cake. Mr. Dandridge brushed his lips with a heavy monogrammed linen napkin. "Why do you call it 'usurpation and confiscation,' ma'am—the government's calling in your gold, I mean? After all, you received—they didn't just take it—you got money for it, didn't you?"

Miss Isabella waved her cane. "Only banknotes!" she said angrily. "Shinplasters! And to think they took our good Northern gold to Kentucky—a nest of Rebels!"

But Mr. Dandridge was no longer concerned with the gold. "And what did you do with all those shinplasters?" he asked. Miss Isabella was drinking tea, so her younger sister replied.

"It is somewhere around, I suppose," she said. "It doesn't really signify."

Mr. Dandridge got up. "It signifies to *us*," he said. He pointed to Mr. Goltz, who had put his camera to one side and had something else in his hand. "Now, ladies, you are going to show us to your money and we are going to take it. Everything

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will be done quickly and quietly, and no one will be hurt. Up, please."

The two old women looked from him to the revolver in Mr. Goltz's fist.

"And you a photographer!" said Miss Sapphira, her pink cheeks very pink indeed. "Why, poor Mr. Brady would turn in his *grave* if he knew."

"Led'm," said Goltz, briefly. "C'mon, where's the money, ladies? Where ya goddit stashed away?"

Miss Isabella sighed and started to rise upon her cane. Dandridge reached to assist her, but she drew back with such an expression of disdain that he let his hand fall. "I suppose the quicker you have it, the quicker you'll leave. And 'tis only greenbacks, after all—no better than the credit of the government, and if the government allows banditti such as you to roam the peaceful streets of Brooklyn it has very little credit indeed . . . I think they may be in the cedar chest."

The cedar chest proved, after prolonged searching, to contain four bolts of linen and approximately one hundred copies of *Godey's Lady's Book*, all in perfect condition. While Goltz glowered, Miss Sapphira picked up a magazine and let out a little cry of pleasure. "Look, sister! A story by dear Grandpapa's friend whom he so often told us about, poor Mr. Poe. I'm so glad I've found it. I shall read it tonight."

For the first time Dandridge's control slipped its mooring. "Quit this fooling around!" he shouted. "I want that money located in ten minutes—or—"

Miss Sapphira said that she wondered if he fully realized what effect this episode would have on the *young* people of the country if it became known. A most deleterious one, she was afraid.

Her sister stood in a pose of deep thought. "It's been so many years—" she said. "Now, could it be in the mahogany press? That is in the next room. I have the keys on my chain, here, but one of you will have to bring the candles."

The afternoon had grown late and dark and the candles, held by Dandridge, shed a scanty light in the cold room while Miss Isabella fumbled for her keys. Goltz said, "I had enough a this. Them candles are too spooky, and I like ta see what I'm doing." He reached up and tugged the cord of the dusty electrolier overhead. The cord snapped off in his hand, but the lights went on. Miss Isabella and her sister clicked their tongues. Dandridge blew out the candles.

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"Open it up," he ordered. Miss Isabella complied. Two large cloth bags tumbled out, and—as the two men exclaimed—quantities of paper money poured from them. Dandridge fell on his knees, grinning. Then, as he examined the money, his grin faded. He waved one of the bills toward the Misses Vanderhooft. "Is *this* what the government gave you for your gold?" he demanded incredulously. "The Planters and Merchants Bank of Boggs County, Missouri?"

The sisters sighed, shook their heads.

"So that is where it was? Dear me."

"An unfortunate speculation in wildcat currency on the part of Great-uncle Isaac—dear Grandpapa's brother. We never knew him. He fell at the Battle of Pittsburgh Landing in the year—"

A heavy hand beat loudly on the front-door knocker. A heavy voice called, "Is anything wrong, ladies? Hello, hello! Is anything—"

Miss Isabella, looking Goltz straight in the eye, and without changing by a hair's breadth the expression of calm disdain on her face, opened her mouth and called, "Help!" in a clear, level voice. Goltz went livid, raised the revolver, shook his head threateningly. "Help! Footpads!" Miss Isabella called out.

Miss Sapphira took the candelabra and, with an underhand pitch, threw it through the windowpane.

"Stop, thief!" she sang out. "Summon the Watch!"

"I hope you don't mind eating from the same cake as those two scant-soaps fed upon," Miss Isabella said. This time *she* cut and passed, while Miss Sapphira poured the tea. Patrolmen Freitag and Johansson shook their heads, swallowed, accepted more. "This recipe comes down to us from the days of Abraham Vanderhooft's second wife. They say that she was an indentured servant before he married her, but it doesn't really signify, does it? And we ourselves descend from the first wife . . . Dear me, what an afternoon!"

Patrolman Freitag washed down his second slice of cake with half of his second cup of tea. "This guy Dandridge—the real one, I mean, the reporter—he better be careful what he does with his old press cards from now on, instead of throwing them away, I hope," he said, rather anxiously, "that you ladies won't mind too much having to go to court and all that? Because—I guess—well, we could maybe say you were

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sick and have them come here to take your testimony—maybe."

Miss Sapphira shook her head, setting the long gray ringlets in motion around her pink face. "It is very kind of you young men to be so considerate—but I trust that my sister and I are sensible of our duty as citizens."

Her sister nodded, then asked, as if the thought had just struck her, how it was that the attention of the two policemen had been drawn to the house so much earlier than usual. Johansson smiled. Freitag smiled. The former answered.

"It was the electric light," he said. "We were just cruising down Huyk Street and we saw the electric light—I mean, the shade and the curtains were drawn, but we could see it was electric. So I says to Freitag, I says, 'Oh-oh. I been living in this neighborhood for thirty years and I never saw no electric lights burning in the Vanderhooft house, not since Mr. Cornelius passed away.' And he says, 'Neither did I, Nels. Never anything but candles.' So we figured we'd better investigate. I gotta give you both credit—what you did, it took courage."

Miss Isabella said, "Poo." Her sister said, "Pshaw. Hogsnatchers is all they were, trying to get above themselves."

"It was not our idea at all, to install the incandescent lamps," Miss Isabella explained. "It was our brother's. But we have never used them since he died. Such devices exude a malign magnetical influence."

"Isabella," asked Miss Sapphira, "now that so much attention has been drawn to the matter I confess that I am mildy curious myself as to where those banknotes are."

The older sister's ivory forehead creased in thought. Then she said, "Do you know, sister—I wonder if we did not ask Mr. Caldwell to take them down to the Trust Company and purchase bonds or something with them during the war."

Miss Sapphira considered. "Did we? Perhaps you are right. Perhaps we did."

"Ah, well," said Miss Isabella. "It doesn't signify. More tea for the Watch?" she asked.

"O"

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a *NEW* Grandfather Rastin novelet

Grandfather Rastin is back! — in one of the most baffling mysteries ever to hit Borgville, Borg County, Michigan . . . It is said that too many cooks spoil the broth. Do too many crooks spoil the crime? Do too many sleuths spoil the detecting? Judge for yourself: there are no less than six detectives in this murder case — Grandfather Rastin, of course, and Sheriff Pilkins and Deputy Sheriff Steve Carling and Sergeant Reichel of the State Police and Evelyn Deet and Johnny (Grandfather's "Watson"). No, come to think of it, there are seven detectives — you are Number Seven, if you'd care to try your hand at matching clues and conclusions. . .

GRANDFATHER AND THE RIGHT QUESTION

by LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.

My Grandfather Rastin gave up hunting when he passed his sixtieth birthday—not because he thought he was getting too old for it, but because he didn't want to get shot. His attitude toward hunting being what it is, and his attitude toward Sheriff Pilkins being what that is, it's not surprising that he stormed up to his room and locked the door when Sheriff Pilkins turned up at our house wearing a brand-new red hunting jacket and a slick, long-billed red hunting cap. The Sheriff banged on the front door with one hand while turning the handle of the doorbell with the other. I recognized his mood and got there before he started kicking the door.

I was wrong about his mood. He wasn't mad, he just had troubles. He asked almost politely, "Your Grandfather at home?"

"He's temporarily indisposed," I said. "He says the sight of you makes him sick."

"That's too bad, because I'm

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about to make him sicker. John Deet's been killed in a hunting accident. Tell your Grandfather I want to talk with him."

I tromped upstairs and told Grandfather through his locked door, and he said, "Tell Pilkins I'm surprised it didn't happen years ago, and I don't want to talk about it."

I went back downstairs and told the Sheriff, and he thought it over, still not mad but maybe a little more troubled. "Tell him it's important," he said finally.

"Look," I said. "I wouldn't want you to think I don't have respect for the law, but this could go on all afternoon, and Mom's worried about the stair carpet wearing out. Why don't *you* go up and tell him?"

He knew that would be a waste of time, so he decided to talk with me. He said, "Johnny, what do you know about Ronnie Mayer's .22 rifle?"

I stared at him "He hasn't got one! He wouldn't dare. His dad would break his neck."

"Sure. That's what he says, and that's also what his dad says, but the fact is he has one. How well do you know Evelyn Deet?"

"No better than I can help," I said. "She's a brat."

"How'd she get along with her stepfather?"

"It wouldn't surprise me if she were out celebrating right now. She still calls herself 'Anderson,' you know. She won't use the name 'Deet.' "

"Does she date Ronnie Mayer?"

"You'll have to ask the Wiston High kids about that."

The Sheriff pushed himself to his feet. "About ten minutes after I leave, your Grandfather will get over being a mule and want to know what happened. Just to save him the trouble of finding out, I'll tell you. John Deet and Jim Tyler were hunting pheasant on the Mayer farm this morning. They were working south from Squaw Road, and they separated to go around a thicket. At the other side Tyler waited ten, fifteen minutes, afraid he might spoil a shot for John if he stepped out before John was ready. Finally he circled back around the thicket and found John dead. He'd been shot in the head with a .22 rifle."

"What were they hunting with?" I asked.

The Sheriff snorted. "Shotguns. Who'd hunt pheasant with a .22? They were both using John's guns. Tyler never hunted before, and John loaned him a shotgun and also an old hunting jacket. He says he'll never hunt again, but that's as it may be. The ground is low there, and there's a gradual rise to the

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north and west. The bullet could have come quite a distance, but even if it was an accident I've got to find out who fired that shot. The first question is: who in that vicinity owns a .22? The second question is: where was Evelyn Deet this morning?"

"Why don't you ask her?"

"I did," he said disgustedly. "She won't tell me."

He went out to his car and stood there for a moment, scratching his head and looking back at our house. Finally he drove away.

I sat down and watched the clock. Three minutes and sixteen seconds after the Sheriff left, Grandfather's door opened. He clomped down the stairs and picked up the telephone.

"What are you doing?" I asked him.

"I want to find out what happened."

So I told him while he sat rocking in his rocking chair without saying anything until I mentioned Ronnie Mayer's .22. That brought him to a dead stop. "First question—bah!"

That surprised me. "What's wrong with asking who owns a .22?"

"As a question, nothing. But as a *first* question—"

"What difference does it make what order the Sheriff asks the questions in?"

Grandfather got up, not looking happy. "I should go over there and have a look at things. But it's hunting season, drat it!"

As Grandfather tells it, the front lines of either World War had nothing on the main highway between Borgville and Wiston when the hunters are out. He thought it over for the rest of the day and most of Sunday and didn't make up his mind until late Sunday afternoon when Ed Mayer called to tell him that the Sheriff had just arrested Ronnie. Five minutes later we were on our way to Wiston.

Before going out to the Mayer house we stopped at the Deet place, which is an old house not far from the Wiston business district. Those two houses made quite a contrast. Mrs. Nancy Deet already had a black wreath on her front door, and inside Evelyn was playing rock and roll records. There wasn't any wreath at the Mayer's house, but the place was dead.

Doc Hodge was paying a friendly call on Mrs. Deet, and he went to see if she felt like coming down. Grandfather sat down in John Deet's den and started looking through a pile of magazines. One wall of the

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room was a long gun cabinet with sliding-glass doors, and I put my nose against the glass and looked at the guns.

"Isn't that a .22?" I asked.

"It's a .22," Doc Hodge said, returning from upstairs. "John had the only key, and Nancy had company here all morning, so no one could have borrowed it. Sheriff Pilkins checked on that. Believe me, he checked. Nancy will be down in a minute. She's doing as well as can be expected, and Evelyn doesn't need anything but a good paddling, which doesn't require a doctor, so I'll be on my way."

"Do you suppose Nancy would care if I borrowed some of these magazines?" Grandfather asked.

Doc walked over to have a look at them "Water skiing, archery, boating, hunting, skin-diving, camping, nature trails—all that stuff looked good on John Deet, but it's a shade inappropriate for you, isn't it?"

"I like to look at the ads," Grandfather said.

"Ask Nancy. I'm sure it will be all right as long as you don't turn the pages too recklessly."

He went out laughing, and a moment later Mrs. Deet came in. She was wearing a black dress and she didn't look as pretty as I remembered her, but she also didn't look as though she cared how she looked. Grandfather had just one question for her. It absolutely floored me, and she didn't even blink. "Who were the business people and customers on John's Christmas list last year?"

She said John always looked after that himself, but she gave him a few names she thought were on it. Then we looked in on Evelyn, who was down in the basement thumping her feet in time with the music. She ignored us until the record was finished.

"How'd you make out with the Sheriff?" Grandfather asked her.

She made a face at him, which is one thing that girl really has a talent for. "He's a nosey old creep," she said. "Wanted to know if I date Ronnie Mayer."

"Do you?" Grandfather asked.

"That goodie-goodie? *Nobody* dates him. His mother won't let him go out with girls. Look here." She stood up and glared at him, hands on hips. She was wearing slacks and a baggy shirt, but for all that she might have been pretty if it hadn't been for her making faces all the time. "I won't say I'm sorry John was killed. I never liked him when he was alive, and I'm not going to pretend I did now he's dead."

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"Evelyn—" Mrs. Deet said from the top of the stairs. She sounded as if she were about to cry.

"Never mind, Mother. He's just another snoop, like the Sheriff. I hated John from the first time he ever came to see Mother, when I was only seven, but as I got older I did learn to respect him. In all those years I can't think of a time he wasn't nice to me. I used to want him dead, but I got over that. I've known for a long time that as men go he was a good one, but that didn't make me stop hating him. Nothing would, as long as people expected me to call him 'Dad.'"

She put on another record and turned the volume up a notch. This may not be a polite way to end a conversation, but it certainly is effective. Grandfather and I went back upstairs, and Grandfather picked up the magazines he was borrowing and Mrs. Deet saw us to the door. She didn't say anything, and if she had it probably would have embarrassed all three of us.

We found Mr. Mayer pacing in a circle in his parlor. He paced all the time we were there. He looked beaten. He's a big man, but his shoulders weren't equal to the weight that had been dumped onto them.

"Guns!" he said. "All Ronnie's life I've told him guns were no good. I wouldn't let him play with guns when he was little. Guns kill. Why would he save his money to buy one and not tell me? He's always been a good boy."

Grandfather found a rocking chair in the corner and went to work in it. "I guess that's why. Sometimes the things a boy isn't allowed to have seem mighty attractive."

Mrs. Mayer had been crying, but she managed to bring in coffee and cake, and a glass of milk for me, and then she went upstairs. Mr. Mayer kept on pacing.

"Why haven't they made a ballistics test?" Grandfather asked. "Even Sheriff Pilkins should be bright enough to know that if Ronnie's gun—"

"That's the problem. Ronnie doesn't have the gun. It was stolen."

Grandfather stopped rocking. "Stolen? When?"

"A couple of weeks ago. Ronnie parked the car in Wiston without locking it, and the gun was stolen. He was afraid to report it."

"That *is* a problem."

"The Sheriff thinks he hid the gun somewhere after he shot John Deet."

"To Pilkins that would be a logical assumption. Did you get a lawyer for Ronnie?"

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"Lawyer!" Mr. Mayer snorted. "If Ronnie is guilty he'll have to pay the penalty. I don't want no lawyers twisting the law and making deals."

"Ronnie had no more to do with John Deet's death than you did. He should have a good lawyer," Grandfather insisted.

"All right. I'll get him a lawyer."

"This is what comes of Pilkins asking the wrong questions," Grandfather said. "Come on, Johnny. Let's go see some people."

We drove back to Wiston, and Grandfather got out the names on John Deet's Christmas list. At the first two places no one was home. At the third there was company and Grandfather wouldn't stop. The fourth name was Jake McFarland, a long-time friend of Grandfather's, and when Grandfather asked him one of those right questions it was quite a letdown.

"What did John give you for Christmas last year?"

"A wallet," Jake said. "He noticed that mine was worn. Trouble was, everyone noticed that it was worn, so I got six. Why?"

"Just curious. I heard he was giving magazine subscriptions for Christmas. Know who got them?"

Jake shook his head.

"Ever go hunting with John?"

"Once, a long time ago. He gave me my Christmas present early that year—a hunting license. Always trying to make hunters out of people, John was. I went out with him once so as not to seem ungrateful. We went to the Mayer farm, too. He hunted there every year. How's Nancy taking it?"

"Pretty well. Did John give out any early Christmas presents this year?"

"Not that I know of. Nancy must be taking it a lot better than John's partner. Jim Tyler is all broken up—emotionally and financially."

"Why financially?" Grandfather asked.

"When a partner dies, the survivor is in trouble. Bill Elgin was after them a couple of years ago to draw up some kind of legal agreement and take out life insurance on each other to cover this sort of thing. They never did get around to it. Jim thinks he'll have to sell out to satisfy John's estate."

"Nancy will work out something with him. They've always been good friends."

"Friendship bends funny ways under stress," Jake said. "Nancy's already called in a lawyer to advise her. You'd think she could have waited until after the funeral."

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"That is odd. Doesn't sound like Nancy."

"You never can tell how a woman will react to anything. Seems to me I've heard *you* say that a few times."

"Men can be pretty unpredictable creatures, too," Grandfather said. "Not to mention sons and stepdaughters."

The conversation died a natural death, and we went back to my jalopy. I said to Grandfather, "Is that the question the Sheriff should have asked? 'What did John Deet give you for Christmas last year?' "

"The most important questions aren't the ones a law-enforcement officer asks other people. They're the questions he asks himself. Pilkins doesn't know the difference."

The next name on the list was Ben Carse, who lived in a plush tri-level house in a plush neighborhood of tri-level houses. He was a jolly little bald-headed man who could have played Santa Claus with no props at all except large amounts of white hair in the right places.

"John was like a son to me," he said. "I warned him about that partnership with Tyler—John's a fine salesman, and Tyler is the best TV repairman in Wiston, but neither one of them is a businessman. But they seem to have done well."

"I heard you started out with them on Saturday," Grandfather said. "What happened?"

Carse shrugged. "All I know is that maybe a half hour after we separated, Tyler came tearing after us like a madman saying John had been shot. So I went back with him and my boy Mike ran up to the Forbes house to telephone for help. But John was already past any help that we or anyone else could have given him."

There was a magazine rack beside my chair. Remembering Grandfather's question about magazine subscriptions, I pawed through it and turned up two hunting magazines and one on nature trails. I held one of the magazines up so Grandfather could see the cover, and he nodded and asked Mr. Carse, "What did John give you for Christmas last year?"

Carse grinned. "A lovely desk set, and every piece is engraved *The Wiston Appliance Company*. John had a sense of humor."

Grandfather thanked him politely. I was ready to go home, but Grandfather said Jim Tyler lived somewhere in the neighborhood and he wanted to see him. Actually it was a couple of plush neighborhoods

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away, in the fanciest part of Wiston, and the house looked the way Mount Vernon would look if it were shrunk a bit and crowded onto a city lot. Mrs. Tyler said Jim was at the store.

"Any idea when he'll be back?" Grandfather asked.

She shook her head. "He's getting things ready for taking inventory."

"Mind if we wait?"

I think she was glad to have company. She offered us some food, which Grandfather declined without consulting me, and we sat down in the living room. While she and Grandfather talked I found another magazine rack to work on. This time I turned up a boating magazine. At the first break in the conversation I decided to help out with Grandfather's detecting. "Did Mr. Deet give this to Mr. Tyler for Christmas?" I asked.

"For his birthday," Mrs. Tyler said. "John gave him subscriptions to four magazines, but that's the only one Jim liked. He's always been daft about boats. We almost bought a cabin cruiser last summer, but fortunately we decided to wait."

"I hear Jim is worried about the store," Grandfather said.

Mrs. Tyler drooped. "The store is ruined. Even if Jim could satisfy John's estate without liquidation, he couldn't make a go of it alone."

"He ought to give it a try."

She shook her head. "You know how they operated. John looked after the front of the store—he was a wonderful salesman. Jim looked after the back. They were getting along very well. Now—well, we talked it over at dinner. Jim would probably go broke while trying to find someone to take John's place. The wisest thing would be to salvage what we can and go back to our own TV repair business. We won't get rich, but it's *safe*, and we've made some good investments. It's such a shame. John was only forty-two and such a wonderful person. And they were doing so well. Would you like to see the house?"

She gave us the grand tour, from Jim Tyler's electronic gadgets in the basement workshop to the attic, which was really a sort of unfinished upstairs. At the top of the stairway, lying on a big pile of boxes, I spotted a .22 rifle.

Mrs. Tyler saw me staring at it, and she smiled and said if I was going into the detective business I'd have to work faster. "Steve Carling—the Deputy Sheriff, you know—he was here to look at it yesterday. He didn't even bother to wipe the dust off it. Something or other

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doesn't work, and it hasn't been fired since Jim was a kid."

When Jim Tyler finally turned up he looked dead-beat and well on his way to being a corpse himself—he's real tall and that thin anyway. But he didn't seem to mind talking about what happened. "There were four of us together," he told us. "The Carses and John and I. We separated at the road—the Carses went north on the Forbes farm, and John and I went south."

"It's surprising John didn't get shot years ago," Grandfather said. "He did most of his hunting with beginners he was always trying to make sportsmen out of."

"I don't agree. There never was a man more careful with guns. This was the second time I went out with him. The first time I carried an empty gun, and yet he blew his top whenever I didn't handle it to suit him."

"Too bad someone hasn't invented a careful bullet," Grandfather remarked.

"I never wanted to go hunting. John kept pestering me, and I finally decided it would be easier to go with him than to go on being pestered. It's too late now to wish I hadn't."

"He would have taken someone else."

"I suppose so."

That conversation didn't just die out, it collapsed, and Grandfather and I got out of the house as politely as we could. We headed for home, and as we drove through downtown Wiston Grandfather pointed out The Wiston Appliance Company, which was the store John Deet and Jim Tyler had been partners in. I didn't see much of it, because I was busy staring at a much bigger store on the other side of the street—The Carse Appliance Company. "Carse?" I exclaimed.

"Ben Carse. That's the man we were talking with."

"John Deet went hunting with an enemy?"

"Competitor. Nobody could be an enemy of John Deet. He worked for Carse for ten years before going into business with Jim Tyler. You heard Carse say John was like a son to him."

"Even so, The Carse Appliance Company doesn't have a wreath on the door, and its business won't suffer if The Wiston Appliance Company goes under. Darn—just when I was thinking *nobody* profited from John Deet's death."

"It all depends on what you mean by 'profited.' "

"Does Ben Carse own a .22?"

"Now *that's* an angle for

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Pilkins. Why don't you suggest it to him?"

"Sure. I'll drive right over to his house and do it now."

"Let him have one more night's sleep thinking John Deet was killed accidentally. Now stop talking and drive. I want to get home so I can look at these magazines."

On Monday I came home from school expecting to spend the rest of the afternoon and maybe most of the night chauffeuring Grandfather all over Borg County while he looked for the answer to one of his right questions. I found him rocking in his room, and he politely asked me to leave and close the door. Mom told me he'd been on the telephone most of the day, and she supposed he'd found out what he wanted to know

"What did he talk about?" I asked.

"I wasn't paying any attention. Unlike you two, I have work to do."

"Was it anything about Christmas presents?"

"The idea! Christmas is still weeks away!"

I pestered her until she managed to remember a big argument that Grandfather had with Sheriff Pilkins shortly before noon. As a result they probably weren't speaking to each other, but that state of affairs wasn't abnormal or even unusual.

I sat down and tried to do my math assignment. Grandfather's rocking chair was hitting a squeaky floorboard on the backswing, which didn't help my concentration. Finally I gave up, told Mom not to wait supper for me, and drove to Wiston.

A certain amount of information was floating about the joints where the high school crowd hangs out. I heard right away that the Sheriff hadn't really arrested Ronnie Mayer, he just took him in for questioning. Opinion was pretty evenly divided as to whether Ronnie really owned a .22 and whether he had anything to do with John Deet's death even if he did own one. His parents had been away, and he claimed he spent the whole morning in his room writing a term paper on the life of the boll weevil. He had the term paper to show for it, but the Sheriff didn't seem to think that proved anything.

A girl told me that Evelyn Deet was crazy enough about Ronnie to invite him to the Sadie Hawkins Dance, but his mother wouldn't let him go, or maybe he didn't want to go. No one I talked with knew where Evelyn Deet was on Saturday morning.

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It added up to a wasted afternoon. I headed for home saturated with ginger ale and with my whole week's allowance shot, and when I pulled up in front of the house I couldn't park in my favorite parking place because someone had absent-mindedly left a State Police car there.

It was Sergeant Reichel, who commands the State Police Post in Wiston. He came down from Grandfather's room while I was eating supper, and when I asked him what he and Grandfather were hatching he said he'd just sworn a solemn oath not to tell anyone.

"Naturally I wouldn't expect an officer of the law to violate his solemn oath," I said. I went up to see Grandfather about that, and he threw a slipper at me for derailing his train of thought. This being a game two can play, when he came down later and asked me what I'd found out in Wiston I refused to talk. And the next noon, when Sheriff Pilkins waylaid me at Marty's Rapid Lunch to ask me what Grandfather and the State Police were up to, I could tell him honestly that he knew as much about it as I did.

Sheriff Pilkins must have spent the whole day in strenuous thought. He telephoned me right after school with the brilliant suggestion that I date Evelyn Deet and romance her into confessing where she was Saturday morning, and not even the Sheriff could have come up with a notion like that if his brain hadn't been fatigued. I told him there weren't many things I wouldn't be willing to do to serve the cause of justice, but he'd sure hit on one of them.

Then I got to thinking of what Grandfather once said about the Sheriff's knack for putting good ideas in such a stupid way that Almighty God couldn't see the merit in them. So I drove to the Deets' house in Wiston.

Mrs. Deet seemed surprised to see me. Evelyn didn't. She was in the basement listening to records, and she made a face and said, "Et tu, Brute?"

"How was that again?" I asked.

She turned off the record player. "That snoopy Sheriff is siccing everyone onto me to find out where I was Saturday."

"I don't care where you were Saturday," I said. "I just stopped to ask you if you wanted to play detective."

"How do you play detective?"

"You try to find out who shot John."

She made a face. "Who cares?"

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"I thought maybe you did. You said he was a good man, and his being shot sure made your mother unhappy."

"How would we find out who did it?—that is, if I agreed to play."

"I don't know. If it was an accident, it could be almost anyone who has a .22. If it wasn't an accident, then John was murdered, and that's a different sort of problem. Then it would have to be someone who had a motive."

"Someone like me?" she suggested.

"Right. You hated him, so you had a motive. That's why the Sheriff is pestering you. You're maybe the only person in all of Borg County who had that particular motive, because everyone else seemed to like John a lot."

"What other motives are there?"

"Money," I suggested.

"John didn't have a lot of money. We always got along all right, but we certainly weren't rich."

"Romance," I said. "If he was in love with some other man's wife, or some other man was in love with your mother—"

"Bosh! Those two had been honeymooning ever since they were married. Sometimes it was embarrassing living in the same house with them. What else?"

"There could be motives no one knows about. There's also the angle that it had to be someone who knew he was going hunting, but half of Wiston could have known that."

She snapped her fingers. "If I was going to kill someone, and I knew where he'd be and when, know what I'd do? I'd practise."

"That doesn't narrow the problem very much. Probably quite a few people have been target practising with a .22 in the last month or two."

"It narrows it a lot. The murderer will be someone who doesn't have a .22, because if he had one he wouldn't use it because that would point suspicion right at him. So we should look for someone who's been target shooting with a .22 who *doesn't* have one." I raised my eyebrows. "He borrowed or stole one," she said. "Say, Ronnie said his was stolen!"

We stared at each other. "You're a pretty good detective," I said.

"The murderer had to sneak his target practise because he didn't want anyone to know he had a .22," she said. "He couldn't go where other people practise, and he couldn't go near the Mayer farm because after the murder people around

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there would be questioned and if they'd seen someone sneaking target practise they'd remember it. The Mayer farm is west of Wiston, so he'd do his target practise somewhere out east."

"Why not north or south?" I asked.

"Don't be silly. If we found out where he practised, what would we look for?"

"Cartridge cases—.22s," I said.

"Then if—just for example—if it was Mr. Hillburg next door murdering John because of that argument they had two years ago when Mr. Hillburg borrowed our power mower and broke it, and we found he'd been out at his cottage early last week, and we went there and found .22 cartridge cases, that would prove he did it?"

"Not exactly, but it would be a start."

"I like playing detective," she said. "Let's go out to his cottage and look."

"It's getting late," I said. "Don't you think it would be better if we found out first if he's still mad about the mower and if he actually was at his cottage?"

"I forgot. He broke *our* mower—it wasn't him that was mad, it was John. Anyway, his cottage isn't out east. We want someone who was practising out east. Go upstairs and get on the extension. I'm going to telephone."

I went upstairs. Mrs. Deet asked me what we were doing, and I told her I'd let her know as soon as I found out. Evelyn called Eddie Longer, whose father is a farmer east of Wiston, and she told him she was tracking down a murderer. "Where is it people go to practise shooting?" she asked.

"Martin's quarry," Eddie said.

"This jerk didn't go there, because he practised sneaky-like."

Eddie pointed out that in that case no one would have seen him.

"Of course someone saw him—otherwise we couldn't catch him, could we?"

Eddie said he'd ask around, and I decided I'd had as much of this kind of detecting as I could take for one evening. I went back downstairs and told Evelyn I had to leave, and she said okay, she'd keep making calls, and by the next evening she'd have places for us to go and do some real detecting.

Darned if she didn't. She skipped school and John Deet's funeral, and when I got to her house after school she had a list of names and addresses. We drove east of Wiston and started working our way down the list, and the only fact we were able

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to detect was that a lot of farmers didn't like hunters. We were almost at the bottom of the list before we found a suspicious character who'd actually been sneaking some target practise.

An old geezer named Gerold Ambeth was renting out the farm next to his. Its barn had burned long before, and the rickety old farmhouse was boarded up and overgrown with weeds and shrubs. When Ambeth took his cows down a lane to the pasture he passed a place where he could see the rear of the farmhouse, and one Sunday morning a couple of weeks before, he saw a car parked there out of sight of the road and a man standing beside it aiming a gun. Ambeth couldn't remember hearing him shoot. He hadn't been interested enough to pay that much attention.

"What sort of a gun was it?" I asked.

"Shotgun," he said.

"We're looking for someone who was target practising with a .22," I said.

He scratched his head and decided it could have been a .22. Anyway, there was one of those canvas gun cases lying on the ground, so the guy could have had other guns with him. He showed us where he'd seen the man standing, and he left.

"He thinks we're nuts," Evelyn said.

"He may be right. Let's look while we can still see something and then get out of here. My stomach has been complaining lately about my irregular meals."

She found a stick of gum in her handbag and divided it with me, and we went to look.

Evelyn got down on her hands and knees and started parting the long grass. I looked around and wondered out loud if the murderer wouldn't have had enough sense to pick up the cartridge cases after he did his sneaky practising.

"What's that?" she asked suddenly.

It was a .22 cartridge case.

She reached for it, and I slapped her hand away. "It should be checked for fingerprints, and when it is, we don't want them to find yours on it."

"Oh!" she said, looking excited and a little scared. "And if it has a fingerprint from Mr. Hillburg, then it means he killed John?"

"Not quite, but I'll tell you this for sure—if it's a real clue, it's nothing for amateurs like us to be messing around with."

"Let's call your Grandfather."

"He'd feel complimented, but where fingerprints are concerned he's just another

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amateur. Anyway, we aren't speaking. At breakfast he asks Mom to ask me to pass the butter. I guess we'd better telephone the Sheriff."

We marked the location with a stick and tied Evelyn's handkerchief to it, and then we drove back to the highway where I remembered seeing a filling station. I called the Sheriff and told him as plainly as I could that we'd played a long shot and didn't know what we'd hit, but if he didn't have anything better to do he might want to take a look at it. "Who's 'we'?" he asked.

"Evelyn Deet and I."

"Where was she Saturday morning?"

I turned to Evelyn. "He won't come unless you tell him where you were Saturday morning."

She sniffed. "The old snoop! I was at Betty Lowell's listening to records."

I told the Sheriff, and he grunted disgustedly and told me to stay put and he'd get there as soon as he could. It was dark when he and Deputy Steve Carling arrived, followed by a car with two more deputies. We led them to the cartridge case, and the deputies picked it up very scientifically and went to work looking for more while the Sheriff drove over to talk with Gerold Ambeth. Evelyn and I wished everyone good luck and headed for Wiston.

"What'll they do with it?" Evelyn asked.

"They'll test it for fingerprints, and they'll show Ambeth some photographs to see if he can identify the guy who was target practising."

"Do you think Ambeth can?"

"Nope. He saw him from a long way off and wasn't interested anyway."

"Being a detective isn't as much fun as I thought," she said. "Nothing seems to settle anything."

"It's adding up a lot of little things more than finding one big thing," I told her. "You saw how eager the Sheriff was even though I warned him that it probably wouldn't amount to anything. I think maybe I should stop and tell the State Police about it. All you and I are interested in is making sure the guy gets caught. We don't care who catches him. Right?"

"I guess so," she said. "But I sort of wanted to catch him myself."

Coming out the door of the State Police Post were Grandfather and Sergeant Reichel. I drove on by, turned a corner, and made an illegal U-turn. "Did you see that?" I asked. She nodded. "Grandfather wouldn't come all the way over

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here to pass the time of day," I said. "Especially at this time of night. Maybe they're about to close in on the murderers. Shall we follow them?"

She bounced up and down and said, "Goody goody gumdrops," and I resisted the impulse to open the door and push her out. We followed them for two blocks, and then they turned onto Highway 29 and headed north. Sergeant Reichel was just taking Grandfather home. I took Evelyn home, and then I turned onto Highway 29 and headed north.

On Thursday neither Evelyn nor I could think of any detecting that needed doing, so I stayed home. Late in the evening Sheriff Pilkins phoned. Grandfather answered, the Sheriff asked for me, and the expression on Grandfather's face was worth the time I'd wasted the day before.

"There weren't any fingerprints on that cartridge case," the Sheriff said.

"What was that about fingerprints?" I asked, knowing that Grandfather would be straining to hear every word.

"There weren't any."

"That's interesting," I said.

"What's interesting about it?"

"Did you try him on photographs?"

"Ambeth? He couldn't pick his own mother out of a lineup."

"That's the way I had it figured," I said.

"So it all adds up to a big zero, except that you did romance Evelyn—"

"Careful!" I yelled.

"Anyway, you found out where she was, and I checked it out, and that's where she was. So, thanks. This other thing—well, we'll keep it in mind, just in case something else turns up to go with it."

"Right," I said. "Thanks for telling me."

I hung up. For the rest of the evening Grandfather didn't have a word to say.

On Friday afternoon I was jerked out of a history test by an emergency telephone call. It was Evelyn Deet, and she said, "Come on over. Right away."

"This history test I'm taking can't be made up," I said.

"I know who murdered John! I want to catch him myself. You better come over."

I didn't know who murdered John, but by that time I knew Evelyn Deet pretty well. "I'll come right after school and watch you catch him," I said. And hung up.

For once she wasn't listening to records when I got there; she was waiting for me. "It's been

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an awful day," she said. "Mother's upstairs crying. There was a long meeting, Mother and Mr. Tyler and the lawyers. Mother and Mr. Tyler are sick about it. The store owes so many bills that they're going to lose everything if they don't raise some cash, and the only way they can do that quickly is to sell the inventory to Mr. Carse, and he's offering so little it's virtually a holdup. It looks as if we'll lose everything no matter what happens."

I decided right then that I'd avoid men who look like Santa Claus and also that I wouldn't give Ben Carse any excuse for being like a father to me. "That's too bad," I said, "but what's it got to do with who murdered John?"

"The only one who's going to make any money out of John being dead is Ben Carse," she said. "He's got rid of his biggest competitor, and he's also going to make a lot of money by buying our inventory at a forced sale. So he's the only one with a motive. Right? So I telephoned the Sheriff and asked him if he'd checked Mr. Carse's .22 rifle, and he said Mr. Carse doesn't have one. So that proves it!"

"Just a moment. He doesn't have one, so that proves—"

"Don't you remember? We decided it had to be someone who *didn't* have a .22. So now all we have to do is prove Mr. Carse *does* have one. Right?"

"All we have to do is prove—"

"Tonight," she said. "He and his wife are going to a church social. We'll sneak into his house while he's gone and find the .22, and the Sheriff can arrest him right at church, which will serve him right. Him pretending to be such a good friend of John's!"

"Maybe he's just being a shrewd businessman," I said.

"That's right. He never lets murder stand in the way of a profit. Say, you're not going to chicken out *now*, are you?"

There had to be a lot of things wrong with her logic, but I couldn't think what they were. "If we're caught," I said, "I hope they call the Sheriff, because the city police aren't going to believe this. Come to think of it, the Sheriff isn't going to believe it, either."

We finished all the cold cuts in the refrigerator, and then we sat around drinking pop until it got dark. She had a route picked out for us, and a place in an alley to park my jalopy, and she led me along a back fence where we wouldn't be seen and right up to the Carses' rear door.

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"There," she said, and from that point it was my problem.

I haven't had much burglary experience, but I have been locked out a few times, and I know how to deal with that. The lower windows of a tri-level house are just above the ground. The screens had been removed, and the storm windows weren't up yet. I tried the first window. It opened and I climbed in. I helped Evelyn in and closed the window.

She handed me her penlight. "Let's start looking."

"If we walk through the house flashing this, the neighbors will have the police here in nothing flat."

"All right, if you're so smart. How'll we do it?"

"We'll start with the attic," I said. "That's a good place to hide a .22, and there won't be any windows where the light will show."

She thought that was brilliant, but she changed her mind after we'd been completely through the house without finding a way up to the attic. I used the penlight very carefully and looked for a ceiling trap in some stupid place like an out-of-the-way corner or a closet, but we couldn't find one. We were about to start over again when I heard a noise. It sounded like a window closing.

I whispered to Evelyn, "Stay here!"

I tiptoed back to the middle level and stood looking down the short flight of steps that led to the family room where we'd entered. Beyond the family room was the garage. I didn't remember a door being open, but one was, and enough light came in from a streetlight for me to see someone moving there. He was fumbling around in the far corner.

Then a flashlight stabbed through the family-room window, someone shouted, and the guy in the garage came tearing through the family room and up the steps. If I'd had time to think about it I would have let him go. It was pretty obvious that he had no business there, but neither did I.

But I didn't have time to think. He hurdled the steps, I stuck out my foot, and he fell with a crash that shook the house, going headfirst into the wall on the other side of the hallway. I dove on top of him to try and hold him, and he didn't even move.

Then a flashlight beam hit me in the face, and from somewhere close to my right ear Evelyn squealed. Grandfather's voice bellowed, "What in thunderation are you doing here?"

"Just staying one jump

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ahead of you," I said.

Evelyn whispered in my ear, "I was right! It *was* Mr. Carse!"

Then a State Trooper turned over the guy I'd been sitting on, and it wasn't Mr. Carse—it was Jim Tyler. He'd been carrying something in his hand—a thingamagadget such as I'd never seen outside of comic books. It was a tube about eight or nine inches long, with one big end and an adjusting screw. It looked like a half-baked inventor's mechanical pea shooter.

"We blew it," Sergeant Reichel's voice said. "Now we'll have to search the house."

"For what?" I asked him.

He pointed at the thingamagadget. "The other one," he said. "Obviously he planted it in Ben Carse's house, and he was planting this one, too, when we interrupted him."

I was adding up one and one and liking the answer. "It's in the garage."

"Sure about that?"

"I'll show you." I led him to the corner where I'd seen Tyler poking around. On a shelf behind boxes of nails and old paint cans was another thingamagadget. Sergeant Reichel started to reach for it, and I stopped him. "Better use your handkerchief," I said. "It may have fingerprints."

He looked at me very strangely and got out his handkerchief.

"Just tell me one thing," I said. "What is it?"

"An adaptor. An insert barrel that converts a shotgun into a .22 rifle."

I could have seen what was coming next with my eyes shut. "One of those would come in handy," I said, "if someone seeming to be carrying a shotgun wanted to make it look impossible that he could kill anyone with a .22 rifle. You know what I mean?"

"You aren't kidding. How'd you know it was Tyler?"

"Evelyn Deet and I have been working on the case all week. We found the place where Tyler did some target practise before he used this gadget for real. A farmer saw him there with a shotgun, but Evelyn and I found a .22 cartridge case."

"The devil you did!" Sergeant Reichel exclaimed.

Grandfather had followed us and he was listening very quietly.

"The Sheriff has the cartridge case," I went on. "Tyler didn't want to try a murder without testing the gadget first."

We went back upstairs. The State Troopers had Tyler handcuffed, but obviously he had a king-sized headache and

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was too dazed to give them any trouble. They seemed less certain of how to handle Evelyn Deet, who had walked over to Tyler and was staring at him. Suddenly she screamed, "You crud! You murdered my dad!"

And burst into tears.

The police seemed to think she was my problem, since I'd brought her, so I hurried her out of there and took her home.

On Saturday afternoon, when Grandfather walked up to Main Street to borrow Mr. Snubbs's morning paper, I telephoned Sergeant Reichel. "Grandfather's so mad about my getting there first that he isn't speaking to me," I told him. "There are a couple of things I'd like to know."

"As long as you keep it in the family," he said. "That was a good piece of work you and the girl did. The farmer couldn't tell Tyler from Adam, but we may be able to prove ballistically that the cartridge case was used in the adaptor, and we got a lovely cast that matches one of Tyler's tire treads."

"Tell me this. How did Grandfather get onto that adaptor business?"

"Last summer John Deet loaned him a copy of a hunting magazine. It had an article Deet wanted him to read about how safe it is to go hunting. He didn't read the article, but he had a lot of fun looking at the ads, and one of the ads described that adaptor. Your Grandfather claims that as soon as he heard about the accident, he knew Tyler did it and how, and after that it was only a matter of finding the evidence."

"What was all that fa-de-la about John Deet's Christmas list?"

"Your Grandfather's hunch was that Deet gave Tyler a subscription to the magazine with the ad for the adaptor in it—which he did, though actually it was a birthday gift. The dealer had only one recent order for an adaptor from this part of the state, and that turned out to be from Tyler using an assumed name in care of General Delivery in Jackson. He was so eager to get his hands on the gadget that he went up there twice to ask about it before it arrived. The Post Office clerk didn't have any trouble identifying him."

"How did the second adaptor come into it?" I asked.

"Well, we had a good case, but we figured it would be better if we found out how he disposed of the adaptor after he used it. We had the dealer airmail another one to Jackson, and your Grandfather filed a

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change of address in Jackson so the thing would be forwarded in care of James Tyler, Wiston. It arrived yesterday, and Tyler must have flipped his lid trying to figure out how the Jackson Post Office had identified him. We hoped he'd get rid of it wherever he did the first one—bury it in his back yard, or something. We had no notion that he'd planted the first one in Carse's house, and even if we'd had we wouldn't have expected him to go completely off his rocker and take the second one there, too."

"Was he really trying to frame Ben Carse?"

"If he was he lost his nerve and didn't go through with it. Not that it would have mattered. Those adaptors are coated with a special oil, and we found traces of it in the pocket of the hunting jacket Tyler borrowed from John Deet. We got a real good case."

"Sure," I said. "Why did he kill his partner and ruin the business?"

"Because the business was already ruined. Deet looked after the front of the store. Tyler looked after the back, which included the office, and he embezzled so much that the store was almost bankrupt. Deet wanted to hire an auditor to go over the books and tell them why they weren't making any money. Tyler knew he'd go to jail, so he stalled Deet off until hunting season and planned the murder. He thought he'd be able to conceal the thefts in the confusion that would follow. When they split up at that thicket, Tyler inserted the adaptor, circled around behind Deet, and shot him."

"Sure," I said. "Now tell me how Grandfather knew Tyler did it as soon as he heard Deet was dead."

"I've wondered about that myself. Why don't you ask him?"

"It wouldn't do any good," I said. "He'd just say that he asked himself the right question."

But I did ask him. As soon as he got back with the paper I said, "Look, I've got everything else figured out. You claim that you knew right away that John Deet had been murdered and that Tyler did it. How did you know?"

"I asked myself the right question," he said.

I started feeling around for something to throw at him, then he chuckled and said, "Law-enforcement officers ought to use their eyes and ears. When a man is shot, whether it looks accidental or not, the first question has to be: did anyone in the immediate vicinity have a

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motive for wanting that man dead?"

"And you knew Tyler had a motive?"

"The Tylers have been living well—they have that expensive new house, they have money to invest, and Mrs. Tyler can't say enough about how well the store was doing. On the other hand, the Deets weren't able to afford a new house, and Mrs. Deet knew her husband was worried about the store. Anyone who knew the two families had to be aware that something was wrong—one partner was prospering and the other wasn't."

"I think you've got it all haywire," I told Grandfather. "It isn't asking the right question that's so important—it's knowing the right answer."

"O"

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"If old Theresa can't take it with her, then she's not going!"

THE BIG TRIP

by ELSIN ANN GARDNER

This was the part of the day that Theresa liked best. Dishes done, place straightened, time to rest in bed, sip a cup of tea, watch television and have a cigarette. Being alone wasn't such a bad thing, she'd come to think. No man to order her around, no children to cause her grief, to stick her with babysitting the grandchildren when they wanted to go out on the town. Just two aloof cats, a small apartment, and her TV. The last of life for which the first was made. She was alone the first part, she'd be alone in the last part. And that was fine with her. As the years had worn on, she'd needed companionship less and less. One thing she'd come to treasure above all else—her independence. Her freedom to do as she pleased. Other women her age had ties. Not Theresa. Her life was her own, every minute of it, and that was exactly the way she wanted it.

Carefully, frugally, all these years she had saved her money for The Big Trip to Europe. It had become a joke at the office, the extent to which Theresa would go to hang onto her money. Once she had heard one of the young girls say, "If old Theresa can't take it with her, then she's not going!"

Let them laugh, she thought. When they were old, living on a pension, they would remember her—Theresa and her Big Trip Around the World. Yes, let them laugh, they who had no thought for the future, who lived from day to day, spending their money as fast as they got it.

Now she was having the joy of planning the trip, going to travel bureaus on her lunch hour, deciding on the clothes she'd buy. Oh, the countries she'd see! Switzerland, for sure. And Spain, the Netherlands, England, Italy—the world would be hers!

Retirement in two short months—and then the fun would begin! The money was ready, safely tucked away in her mattress, hundreds and hundreds of dollar bills. Just two months to wait! She shut her eyes, smiling, thinking of

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the moment she'd get on the airplane, when The Big Trip would finally begin. . .

"What's she blabbering about *now*?"

The other woman shrugged. "Same old thing, how she's going to go to Europe and see everything. I kinda feel sorry for her, you know?"

"Uh, uh. Don't go feeling sorry for them, Wanda. You gotta harden your heart or you'll go crazy working here, you should excuse the expression!"

The other woman laughed at this witty remark. "Yeah. Anyway, I guess she's happy enough. I mean, look at her, off in her dream world all the time."

"Funny about her," the first woman mused. "I was here when they admitted her, ten years ago. Seems she was a fine, normal woman, until one night she fell asleep smoking in bed. Neighbors got her out okay. She wasn't burned much, but by the time the firemen got there, her apartment was ruined, every bit of furniture burned to a cinder. You wouldn't think that would make someone go insane, would you?"

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a NEW crime-detective story by

JOHN PIERCE

Once again John Pierce releases his meanings slowly, slowly . . . once again the different levels are almost grudgingly revealed . . . once again we are given fascinating characterizations—Milo Cagle, the cruel, egotistic, handsome playboy (overlord and master); George Crenshaw, the tortured, destitute, unhandsome artist; Alexis Cagle (née Hanrahan), the cajoling, irresistible Mona Lisa capable of wild laughter. . .

THE ROPEWALKER

by JOHN PIERCE

Soames went to Australia and in ten years managed one postcard, and has not been heard from again. So much for him. Australia, he had heard, was the place to go for a cold beer on Sunday morning. Is it? Who cares? Reassuring enough to know he's gone. I *liked* Soames, we were the best of friends; but in Soames's company—his alone—I committed a gaffe, verbalizing in ruinous detail my detestation of Milo Cagle, a repetition of which could give me no end of gray.

"Milo Cagle," I said acidly. "When the day comes that I opt for suicide I'll dispatch him just ahead of me. I'll kill him dead and then for ten minutes breathe that glorious, uninfested air and, on that note, make my own exit."

"Nonsense," said Soames.

The occasion was a drowning-of-sorrow in my studio loft. Milo had, the day previous, married my childhood sweetheart, Alexis Hanrahan, and they'd teamed together for that noisome joke on me. Try this on an old friend: sneak his girl friend across the state line for a secret wedding, then permit her one last postmarital date with him, and listen to his words of love from her clothes closet. How better pass the time before boarding your plane for Europe?

We worked on a gallon of

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$1.19 domestic wine.

"Rubbish," emphasized Soames. "Isn't Alexis the whole point of it? With Milo erased she'd be available to you once again. Sufficient reason for you not to die."

I said, "After last night and the shrill of her laughter as I went down those stairs?"

"She only did what he induced her to do. Act of love on her part. Gave you the date and let him listen in for a final laugh."

"I allot her less innocence," I protested. "Collaboration asked a cruelty every bit as amoral as his."

"Grow up, Crenshaw. Who's not cruel? It only needs to be got at and made use of, which is Milo's strange forte. He's like some rabble-rouser urging the mob on from the safety of the tenth row back. Take the horse show that night at the Armory—his goading you to turn all the lights out during the ladies' jumping. You very nearly did it just to impress Alexis. You could have *killed* people in that panic. Meanwhile, as you agonized at the fusebox, he made his escape with your girl."

"True enough."

"He played you like a toy concertina and evoked the devil you lacked the temperament to employ. Even so, you've known all that since high school, still you went chasing along behind him, acting as his dartboard, doing his dirty work. Admit that some anger in you found release in his applause at your rebellion. Good old Crenshaw, here's a bone. Here's a ride in the new sports car, a swim in the family pool. Admit that you needed him, however perversely, just the way he needed you."

"Not unnatural," I rationalized. "He had everything I hadn't and never will have."

"And you admired him. You still do. Pitiful business. Milo Cagle, money or not, is the consummate swine, nothing less, nothing more."

"He was wealthy, he was handsome. He had family, poise, Yale, athletic prowess, and that nearly effortless success with women. One can envy worse things."

Soames rolled his eyes in exasperation and sipped his wine. He changed the subject. A month later he had a G.I. insurance refund, a berth on a ship to Australia and was gone.

So is Milo. *They* came home a month ago after ten years of living gaily. Took an apartment, had a calithumpian housewarming, and straightaway came pandering after my friendship, for whatever their scrofulous reasons. *Vale*, Cagle.

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And Soames, what would he say if he knew I'd achieved by that tragedy the rank of Hero of the first order, second class? Pray he'll never know. While drinking he was sometimes garrulous . . .

They keep pestering me, don't you know. Come climbing up the creaking stairs to my studio and pressing microphones against my face. Buying the dull, unremarkable paintings that have gathered soot through the years, wanting, as lagniappe, all the waxen details. How it happened. What were Milo's last words? What had he looked like falling? Why had I turned down the Carnegie lifesaving award?

Because I had not saved Milo's life, obviously.

"But you tried, you risked your own life, and so on"—and there have been a round dozen attempts to buy my oil painting of the railroad trestle bridge where it happened. "Surely you no longer want *that* depressing thing on your wall."

Yes, I do. It had nothing to do with Milo. I painted it years before I ever bought the shanty cabin on the far riverbank.

No, I'd not be drawn into post-mortems. It was all in the evening *Ledger*, or as much as anyone ever had the right to know:

PROMINENT JET-SETTER SWEPT TO SEA

Local Watercolorist in Rescue Attempt

"Tell me something, George," persisted old Mrs. Frapart, who as Chairman of the Art League had till now remained adamantly immune to my talents (she now proposed a vast one-man show), "did it seem to you—I mean, you were his closest friend here in Camptown and all—in your opinion was Milo, lately, all *there*?" She too hesitated by the study of the trestle bridge spanning the raging brown river just before its last turn into the Gulf.

I did not answer. I was very busy. Overnight my clientele had tripled, and I stood nervous guard over the covered portrait of Alexis, work-in-progress that I could ill afford to have seen.

Was Milo all there?

All where?

I must go back a score of days. To ignominy, to bleak unprosperity, to that week when he brought Alexis home . . .

I was crossing Franklin Street with Mrs. Blum's wrapped portrait that morning, certain she'd reject it for the third time; the likeness to the

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fat, raddled photograph was too uncomfortably precise. Death lay everywhere, in the muddlement of my head and the discoordination of my knee joints, in my attempts to reconstruct the night before.

I had showed up at their housewarming without wanting to, had been dragged there by compatriots from the Red Rooster Tavern. No furniture yet graced that apartment; all the world shoved about and spilled drinks; I came to rest on the varnished floor of an empty room somewhere; I gazed thickly into a mammoth volume of Brazilian art, recipes, brochures, and miscellany slipping from the gloss pages. I did not remember getting home. I woke fully clothed. It was 9:30 A.M. and I desperately needed Mrs. Blum's payment for a recuperative drink or two.

Here it was that Milo Cagle hailed me from the bucket seat of his white custom Carmaletti XT-480J with its hydromatic torquemasters and snappy air horn that played Boola-Boola.

"Hey, Crenshaw."

Parked before Imperial Hairpieces, Ltd.

That was Cagle, a green feather in his Tyrol hat. Thirty years I'd known him and I was still "Hey, Crenshaw," summonable across a busy street by my last name and that lazy flick of his aristocratic hand. Hungover I've no defenses; as always I went, that being the hierarchic arrangement: you Silverspoon, me 134-pounds, balding, broke. I was startled and speechless; I was frightened. It had been so long. For ten years they'd done Europe in the high manner on his inheritance, their travels chronicled in detail on the society pages. Now, like some ghastly science-fiction cauliflower spewing up from a manhole, they were home.

His eyes did not miss the bargain suit I had slept in, or the unpolished $7.95 shoes. He said, "Hey, Crenshaw, don't you ever shave?"

I shrugged. "Prerogative of Art."

"Art," he sniffed, not quite smiling, and strummed his fingers on the wheel. Just beside him was a box from Imperial Hairpieces. Party joke?—or had Alexis gone to bouffant wigs? Had she grayed? I might have seen her at their party. Didn't remember.

"We were wondering if you'd got too famous for us," Milo said.

"Famous?"

He sucked a tooth and took a look at himself in the rearview mirror, smoothed an eyebrow with a moistened finger. "Had a housewarming last night, sent you an invitation, hoped you'd

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care enough to come. Champagne, smoked turkey, lot of effort."

The duplicity did me good. Got my gorge up. *I'd* had no invitation. And while I might not remember much of being there, they could hardly have missed me. The old Milo, hopping straightaway on my noncomposness, one-upping me from the start.

No, this year I'd play my own game. "I must not have got the invitation," I said blandly. "Hadn't heard you were back. Been busy and all."

"You? Doing what? And what's that you're peddling?"

"An oil portrait."

"Of whom?"

"Mrs. Blum."

"Never heard of her," he said. "You mean she comes up to that rat's-nest of yours and sits while you paint her picture?"

"It's done from a photograph."

"Photograph," he murmured. He shook his head. "Boy, you'll never make it that way. I mean, is that the way real artists work—Picasso, those guys—from people's photographs?"

Real artists. "I—"

"What I want is to talk to you about something," he interrupted. "Hop in. New racer. We'll take her out on the Freeway and see what she'll do."

No, we wouldn't. I'd had that routine—passing cars at 95 on hills and around curves simply to terrify me. He'd not changed one iota. My insomnia, my retreating hairline, my most terrible nightmares—I attributed them all to Milo's driving, or his ropewalking the balustrade on the forty-first-floor observation tower of the Regency Building, or his diving into a pool and staying under until I was frantic, sure he'd drowned.

"I've got an appointment," I said.

He smiled. At the idea of my having an appointment. "Suit yourself. Give me a call. It's about that cabin I hear you bought on the river across that railroad bridge near the Gulf. Thought I'd rent it from you."

"It's not for rent."

He had another look at my clothing. "Wouldn't think you'd have too much choice," he said. "Call me up."

And kicked his starter and jelled my mind with the engine's blast, charging off through a red light.

I *needed* Mrs. Blum. I'd reduced her chins from three to two, but even so she rejected the portrait. I pawned my watch and, with wrapped portrait, lunched in a corner of

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the Rooster on a boilermaker.

Firmness was needed. Absolute firmness. I'd do sidewalk drawings for nickels and dimes before I rented Milo Cagle anything. Why *would* he want the cabin? If he knew about it, he knew it lacked electric lights, indoor plumbing, and even screens for the windows; it was not reachable by car since the hurricane had blown the road-bridge away. Picture Milo slapping mosquitoes by candlelight and you found murky motivations indeed.

Him smirking over my indigence before Alexis.

Or have I yet sketched him fully?—the prim insolence, the moneyed egoism, but withal the rich sheen that had somehow tethered me—me, poor, underweight, fatherless, brotherless. I was his only hanger-on.

Years of my life. My hand trembled. I called for a second drink and went burrowing for his present reasoning, to wit:

Ah, yes, here is Crenshaw at our housewarming, stumbling-drunk. He'll not remember having been here. We'll do this: chide him for not coming, transfix him with guilt and doubts as to his sanity, knead him to our purposes.

Rent his cabin.

But *why?*

Where was I last night if not at their party?

I fished loose my last bent cigarette and sought matches in any pocket. No luck anywhere unless—here was something from some place, something unfamiliar. A whole sheaf of cultured papers in my right-hand jacket pocket. I withdrew, unfolded, and arrayed them before me on the flyblown bar.

Travel and airline brochures to Honduras, to Chile, to Samoa and Argentina and Greece. A second-rate South American airline. Movies every day *con* Clark Gable, Lana Turner *y* Spencer Tracy. A luxury-hotel prospectus, a premium-due notice on a life insurance policy addressed to Milo M. Cagle, Carlton Hotel, Biarritz. $19.92. What kind of cheesy policy was that for an heir to Money?

Where had I got *this* stuff?

I remembered. I was alone on the varnished floor of a forgotten room at their housewarming; I was floundering through their art book of Brazil. These kept slipping from the pages. In irritation I'd stuffed them into these clothes.

At least, then, I was sure where I'd been.

I needed Mrs. Blum's payment. I was reworking her portrait when light footsteps climbed my stairway and a gentle knock sounded. I knew

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the steps and the knock. I covered the portrait and opened the door. It was Alexis Hanrahan Cagle, coming uninvited to my home and studio, marriage be damned.

"George," she said solemnly. "Invite me in."

"Certainly." But I writhed in shame. A cavernous room, 40 by 50, with inept paintings all about, used furniture and frayed rugs.

"How nice you've kept the same place," she said. She had caramel hair and a voice of caramel that went to suede as it traversed her fine throat and her palate. "Such a marvelous view of the city."

"Coffee?"

"No, I haven't much time. We've been dragooned into some cretinous masquerade party Friday and I've got to run scrounging for a costume."

Explaining, I supposed, Milo's visit to Imperial Hairpieces. "A drink?"

"No, I'd just rather look around—at your paintings—while I get my courage up. There's so much to apologize for."

"Time heals," I lied.

She said, "I've just learned Milo saw you this morning and pulled one of his little beastlies. First let me apologize for that."

"I knew I'd been to your party."

"I know, I saw you, but it was so crowded, and then you disappeared."

"*My* apologies for—"

"Listen, *everyone* was drunk. As for Milo, it's just his way. He never has known any better. Like the raging introvert who has to make a joke or bad pun or humorous non sequitur out of your every attempt at seriousness. Milo's never really had any confidence."

"*Milo?*" I exclaimed. "*Con*fidence?"

"Oh, George, look back through the years. Too much money. Too good looks. An idiot father and those indulgent stepmothers. Milo never once had to test himself."

"Who needs to, with his dough?"

"Come on, you know better. You thought he was such a fine athlete. Did you never notice that he stuck to such sports as golf, skiing, diving, swimming—that he never went near any kind of *team* sport where he'd be required to win the respect of his mates or pit himself against people his own size."

"I've thought of it."

"Exactly. So he settled on you, who groveled and gloried in his freedom to not care. You were company, he could dominate you, you offered no real threat or challenge. Listen, I've been through the same meat

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grinder and at a lot closer range. And that shameful thing we did to you the night of our elopement, that bloodless little practical joke he insisted on—I cringed, I still cringe. A dozen times I tried writing you; I only made it worse."

She turned away to a brace of paintings on a wall. "Some of these really are quite good, you know. Too good for you to be poor. This hick town—why haven't you ever left it? What fun if you could do a painting of me. If he weren't so jealous. Of you."

Of me? "You don't sound too wildly happy." I said hopefully. "Your marriage, I mean."

"It's the noise. It's the airplanes and rich hotels and all the fakery. George, have you ever had the feeling you're going *mad?*"

"Once a day."

"To get *away*, you know, to get *away* from it. I mean, picture this for insanity. I say, 'Milo, can't we just for once get out of this jet-set ratrace?' 'Good idea,' he says, and goes out and books reservations for the Mardi Gras or the Grand Prix or Wimbledon or the skiing wherever the right people are. That, for Milo, is 'getting away.' "

"And he's never worked, never had a job?"

"Like you say, why should he?" She contemplated the floor. "You'll never believe this, but deep down he respects—he even envies—you. We both do. You know why. Because you settled on what you wanted to do and have stuck at it and have more substance to your life than the two of us could—"

"Please, Alexis."

"I mean it."

I was facing the painting of the trestle bridge. Four by five, the water frothing and crashing over rocks before the last bend to the Gulf. Not quite visible on the far bank was my acre. "He wants to rent my cabin. Why?"

"You won't laugh?"

"No."

"He was poking around the ship's library coming home and came across *Walden.*"

Not laugh? Milo Cagle? *Walden?* I only smiled.

"Be charitable. Maybe you would be if you'd seen him, reading and rereading, underlining. The *excitement.* The almost child-like expostulations: 'How about that, being out there all alone in the woods, getting yourself put together.' "

It was too much. It made sausage of my artist's imagination. I muttered.

"Say it all if you feel like it. You've every justification."

"Thanks," I said. "Thanks, I will. See that building, Alexis,

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the Regency Tower over there? His old man had a whole floor up there and I'd go up with Milo when he needed money or God knows what else. Waiting around, he'd take me out onto that observation tower forty-one floors high, just that foot-wide, chest-high cement balustrade encircling it. Of course it took him no time to find out I was terrified of heights. So what did he do then? Did I ever tell you what he used to do?

"He'd get up on that balustrade and ropewalk his way clear around; and not just that, he'd pretend constantly he was losing balance and would pirouette and totter wildly on one leg, and nothing between him and that asphalt street forty-one floors below. I'd yell, 'For God's *sake*, Milo, *stop* it!' and at least twice threw up there from the sheer horror and was sick for days. And I remember that smug little smile of his—oh, he'd got me all right, right by the most secret handle.

"And driving all those supercharged cars his daddy bought him. I loathe speed, blood, broken bodies—all *this* he knew. 'Let's ride down to the drugstore for a soda,' he'd say, and no sooner was I inside than he'd head for the highway; he'd tailgate at ninety, pass on the curves, on hills—and always that triumphant little smile when I protested. I've cried like a baby on those rides. I've offered him any possession I had to stop and let me out. I've come out of there so hysterical and shaken I couldn't eat, couldn't sleep; those rides started me on the nightmares that have scarred me to this day."

"But you never stopped going back for more."

"I know, I know," I exploded. "I've been through all that psychoanalytic guck—Soames used to pull it on me. Well, look at me in those days: undernourished, dirt-poor, untalented, friendless, tongue-tied with fear. What other hero had I access to?"

I stared at the Regency Tower. "And so this morning he hails me debonairly from his latest car, sniffs at my crummy clothes, belittles my work and the place I live in, tries to get me in a car again and then, no, doesn't *ask* me, instead *tells* me he's going to rent my cabin. No, I've had it up to here. There's always a price tag. *Walden*, hell."

"George, *don't* let pride—Look, it was *I*—he was on the way to a realtor to find something—it was *I* who heard about your place and suggested it to him. He'd pay you two hundred a month, cash in

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advance. I'd see to that personally."

"Two *hundred?*" I swung around. "There aren't any lights, there's no road in, only the railroad bridge, no plumbing, no—"

"He knows all that. It's exactly what he wants."

"The two of you out there?"

"Of *course* not me, *him.*" Her lips trembled; she faced away, walking a circle. "I said, 'Milo, damn it, we've got to be apart a few weeks or months, it's the last frail chance this marriage has.' " She turned on me. "You say you've had it up to here. You think you're the only one, George? Well, buddy, *I* married him. Now I've got to get away, too."

"I don't need your charity," I said.

"Then you're being a damn blockhead and not just a little self-centered. *You're* not using the place. I could, my God, be alone and get myself reassembled again, and you could use the money. Can't you see it's in part his way, however clumsy, of making atonement to you? And I could—don't you see it, with him away?—I could come *sit* for you, George, and pay you well for it. Please consider it. You've got *your* freedom, give some thought to those who haven't any."

"I'll think about it," I said.

From my window I watched her into a taxicab—the good legs, the maddening figure. Something, some higher soul-clutching gravity could as easily have sucked me out that window to plunge joyously to my denouement at her feet. I dreamed of her that night. The dream had no coherence.

A freight elevator winched me to the second floor where Mrs. Blum's employment office serviced the down-at-the-heels. She was alone, on the phone, as I entered; while she spoke I unwrapped the portrait and placed it on a chair against the wall. She hung up. Despairingly she sighted on herself. "Utterly impossible. Oh, no, you're not even close. The *fore*head, look at the *fore*head. Oh, no!"

I looked. I never have been very good at foreheads, but it was the same version as on three previous showings and there'd been no complaint before. It seemed no less uncongenial than her own, that sallow mass of bone structure fronting that predatory little brain. I thought of the cabin. Two hundred monthly. "Suppose we just forget it," I said.

"Yes, I think we'd better," she snapped, but then I felt her apprehension as I began the rewrapping. What was I doing with it, she demanded. It

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seemed to her I could at least leave it as free payment for the time *I'd* cost *her*. "My God, it was to have been my husband's birthday gift. I could have, in this time, had someone with a little competence working on the thing."

Was she real? "I need the canvas," I said.

"Now just wait," she erupted. "So all right, it's garbage, but his birthday's tomorrow and I've got to have something. I'll give you twenty-five dollars."

Yesterday I'd have taken it; that she knew. "The price was one hundred," I said.

"Sixty-five."

I wrapped the twine around and knotted it.

I went down the fire stairs with $100. When had I last scored a victory? Over anyone? Bloodsuckers all, jackals on the veldt, the whole snouty herd of them. EXIT led me to an alley fronting the side door of *AEGIS CAMERA AND SUPPLIES, Portraiture, Photos for All Purposes.* Here appeared a further slice of life. From that door a man in goatee, mustache, and Hollywood hairdo emerged, walked around the trash cans, and climbed into a white Carmaletti. He detached goatee, mustache, and abundant wig. Milo Cagle. Transfixed, I'd lost my chance to escape.

"Georgie boy," he said, sighting me.

I walked over.

"Dig me at the masquerade ball wearing this. Don't even recognize myself. Did you?"

"Car's familiar."

"Still burned up, eh? Guess you should be. Alexis wormed it out of me, our yesterday's contretemps. Gave me hell. The truth was, I was so tanked up at our own housewarming I don't remember who was there. Ride home?"

"No, thanks."

"She's dying to see you. Alexis. Wants to apologize. Never got a chance during the party. She's sorry as hell about all that, the night we got married, playing you for a sucker and all. We're both sorry."

I said nothing. Then she'd not even told him she'd come to my studio yesterday.

"Hey, but listen, one thing, George, I really am serious about that cabin. I assume it's just sitting there empty. You may laugh, but here's the truth of it: I got into reading *Walden*, you know? How about that? Exactly what I need a summer of. Chopping my own wood, set up a butane tank and Coleman lighting system, put some screens on. Listen, I'll improve it for you, no kidding. Fish in the river, no telephone, no

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radio, stay off the sauce. I'd really appreciate your considering it."

"I have been."

"Really? Good. I mean, could we maybe ride out and look it over—say, tomorrow afternoon?"

"We might. I'll drive though. It takes a jeep, those rough roads. I'll borrow one from a friend."

Too ecstatically he thanked me and gunned the XT-480J away. Milo in the woodlands, Alexis posing in my studio, and Mrs. Blum outBlumed—all that in one day. One hundred in cash in my pocket. I bought groceries, stuck my suit in the cleaners, swept and mopped my studio, and toward evening I ventured out for a canvas that would accommodate Alexis, all of her, every dimple, every mood. I telephoned Oscar Hebert for the loan of his surplus jeep. I put clean sheets on my bed, dreamed fitfully of Alexis, and woke at three. I lay looking at the Regency Tower bathed in floodlights. Infamous scene.

What was he really up to, the conniving, 24-carat louse? Luring me into an assignation with Alexis? Whereupon he'd come bursting in the room with detectives in tow? Buying hair props the better to shadow her about town? Had she been unfaithful, festering his insecurities? "Jealous of anyone. Of you," she'd said.

On an orange crate were the brochures from their apartment. Class hotels, scenic marvels, *Aeronaves de Guatemala* (Great Movies daily *con* John Wayne, et cetera). Another answer to her pleas for escape from the jet set?—a swim in Samoa, breakfast in Hong Kong. Clark Gable on a DC-3? Money in the amount of $19.92, insisted the notice, was due on his insurance policy. That notice I really should inconspicuously return to them. No use in Alexis being left wanting should something happen to him at that cabin—malaria, a rattlesnake bite, an exploding butane stove . . .

I've seldom used or even visited that cabin since the roadbridge washed away. Access now is by the railroad bridge only, an expedition I abhor. To look down, between the ties, is to see the brown river roiling 40 feet below. Look elsewhere and the moving clouds take you; you lose all worldly contact, and what more awful end than drowning? Death was everywhere. Fighting vertigo, I sighted on the back of Milo's head. I never learn.

Never profit. Cannot hold in mind the potential worst in

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everyman. Had, for example, Mrs. Blum called me again that very morning for another portrait I should most probably have again acquiesced to her bullying. And now here I was following Milo Cagle again, out over this Styx of a river where it boiled and churned toward the Gulf a mile away.

And got what I should have known I'd get. Soames could have predicted it in his sleep, but I never learn.

A single rusted track spans the pilework. Ties protrude a foot or less on either side. There is no railing. The crossing measures a hundred yards. He was fifty feet out when he began it: leaped goat-like from between the rails and went frolicking along the downstream tie-stubs, just as ape intelligence should have forewarned me he would.

"Remember this, Georgie?" On one leg he posed as a fleeing Mercury, then leaned precariously over the awful waters; and then he pretended he had lost his balance, rocked back and fro, and waved his tightrope-walking arms. "*Don't!*" I would have shrieked, but my voice clogged and I felt the onset of the old sickness, the loss of blood in my head, the hollow stomach, the vertigo.

"Try this, George," he shouted above the water's roar and rocked this way and that, pirouetted on a heel, swung out and in and out again, miming panic.

Miming? God, no, not this time. It was too late, he'd gone too far at last; the terror was real now, there was no getting back, and my final glimpse was of that stark anguish in his eyes and the scream of a dying man as he fell.

My reaching his point of departure is beyond my memory. I got there, I *was* there, looking down for a trace of him. I saw the white shirt bob up and submerge again, then the horror of it dissolved me and fell in.

That's what I remember, going under in the cold terrible water, being swept against a rock that doubled me with pain, sinking, floundering, fighting for breath, coming up and feeling strong arms pulling me to the near bank where we'd started.

He said, "Brave fellow, just lie here. No, don't fight me, you did your best, he's gone."

Yes, he was gone, around the bend, inexorably toward the Gulf. A fisherman in hip boots was my savior. His name was Stonecipher. His was the official account that made the headlines: Milo screaming as he fell, Stonecipher's seeing him

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and then seeing me plunge in to save him. My refusal to accept the dread fact of it; my perseverance, once I'd regained strength, in staggering off and away through the brambles along the riverbank in the hope that some double miracle might have occurred . . .

Such nonsense. Such paeans and panegyrics and public mourning over the loss of this narcissist gadfly while worthier souls perished every hour. Such news coverage. Bandaged and in shock, my face swollen blue, I succumbed dazedly to their hullabaloo: shots of me leaving the inquest, of me with Milo in our high school days, of me in my loft beneath paintings of the most profound unimportance. Let it here be said in all honesty that I do confess to my failure to disavow the deception so widely propagated—the deception that I leaped from that bridge to save Cagle. I was too tired to deny it; I had never known fame; I lack character. Give me credit, at least, for refusing the Carnegie award.

Slowly I convalesced, but was still confined to my loft with the sniffles when they—Alexis and one Emmett Goodson—came climbing my stairs about the life-insurance matter.

They took chairs. Spoke Goodson, a bulbous avuncular figure in tailored tan: "We, as his insurers, are not strictly bound by the findings. We are apart from the authorities."

Alexis, wearing black, seemed not to hear him or me. She might have been under sedation, or still in shock. She sat small and alone on the old horsehair sofa, her caramel hair in a tight bun and her sculptured legs crossed modestly above a coil spring that hung down. I had forgotten how lovely her ears were.

"What's your problem, then?" I asked Goodson.

He cleared his throat. He spoke with a pained circumspection, avoiding her eyes. "First, to dispel any, ah, reflections on the word and integrity of our company, let me point out that we have decided to make payment here others mightn't have, or not so quickly. It varies, case to case, company to company—"

"*What* does?" I said.

"Conditions and speed of settlement in the case of the drowned where no, ah, remains have been recovered. Take some shady outfits I could name, it's not at all unusual to see them hold off payment for as long as seven years, and the widow having to pay monthly premiums all that time. Refunded, of course, in time. All discretionary, so to speak. In Mr.

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Cagle's case, well, there were two witnesses and a shoe that came up near the river's mouth and a thorough search was made, and we've been insuring all the Cagles for three generations, got eight or ten policies on them right now. So—payment approved."

"So—what's the problem?"

"Something that came up elsewhere, a matter that's been kept quiet in consideration of the widow and family name and memory of the deceased."

"Yes?"

He cleared his throat. "Well, the fact *is* that Mr. Cagle was, on the day prior to his death, notified by an attorney that he was being indicted by the Federal government reference major income-tax irregularities and other matters. He was bankrupt. There were some very serious credit-card extravagances. None of this information seems to have been communicated to Mrs. Cagle here. Nor did she detect any change in his, ah, morale."

He glanced at Alexis for confirmation. She said nothing.

I said, "So?"

Goodson pinched his nose. "The policy I'm talking about is us, Red Eagle Life and Casualty, as insurers on a $50,000 double-indemnity policy taken out by Mr. Cagle approximately five months ago, by mail from Biarritz, France."

"Fifty thousand on a $19.92 monthly premium?"

Goodson's eyebrows arched. How would I know the premium amount? I explained, producing the brochures and the notice.

"It is," he answered delicately, "our most inexpensive form of that type of accident coverage. A logical enough safeguard investment for one of means."

My soul sighed. That was it. All that, all that preparation, and my thinking all this time he was only getting quit of Alexis. Local crime of the century. Local watercolorist again the dupe.

I went faint, or thought I did, or so pretended. I went across the room to a basin and washed down two pills from a cloudy glass. I had to think. Double indemnity. One hundred thousand to the grieving widow. I saw him now, sitting placidly at the table of some sidewalk bistro in Argentina, chuckling once again at old Crenshaw, waiting happily for her plane.

This I knew, of course. I had soon enough convinced my rescuer Stonecipher that I appreciated his help but refused hospitalization, that I had all the strength necessary to regain my jeep and find a doctor.

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Off I'd gone through the thickets beyond his eye range, and then I turned downstream and followed a path back to the river beyond the bend. Not persisting would have been a crime, not exploring all possibilities: why couldn't Milo have been, like me, caught on the rocks or washed ashore. Somewhere he might be lying unconscious. Hatred is love. I limped and fell a quarter mile, or to that point where a narrow road curled its way down from the distant asphalt. There was a small clearing at the river's edge *Voila*, Cagle.

And there he was, humming a joyous tune. I stopped short, defiladed in bushes. Beside a small car—rented, I later found out—he had changed from wet clothes to low-priced gray suit. He had buttoned his shirt, tied his tie, and then affixed his artificial mustache and goatee and Hollywood hairpiece.

A deep hole in the ground had been *previously prepared;* into this he threw the wet death clothing and refilled the hole by scooping dirt with a board. Now, from somewhere, he produced a handful of documents and reassured himself as to their completeness—a passport (bearded photo doubtless from Aegis Camera and Supplies, Portraiture, Photos for All Purposes), a wallet, and the familiar colored envelope of an airline ticket. Smiled his little smile. Got into the rented car and drove away.

Plainly I could not follow him, and Oscar's jeep was fifteen minutes away. Besides, it wasn't necessary. We have but one airport. I simply drove there. I re-identified the rented car by model and license number, parked conveniently close to the sign on the terminal reading *Aeronaves de Guatemala* (Movies daily, connections to all of South America). . .

"What is it you want to ask me?" I said to Goodson, coming back.

"Questions that must be resolved in fairness to all parties," he said, studying his fingernails. "Terms of policy make it invalid if suicide of the client takes place within two years of contract date. Bankruptcy and Federal indictment could have placed considerable leverage on the mood of Mr. Cagle. You were the last person to speak to him, you were with him during his last hour. I ask you, in your opinion, might his death have been other than accidental?"

Me in my filthy loft with my canned goods and roach bombs. Cagle sipping wine at a sidewalk café, waiting for her. I found her eyes. All there was not grief. Not now. I saw warmth,

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sultry longing, the promise of what she and I might do with the hundred thousand. Or was that what I saw?

No. I saw instead that night years ago when I'd taken her to the horse show inside the old Armory. Out of nowhere Cagle joined us. During an early event the lights flickered perilously, leading to our speculation as to what might happen if the lights went out—the confusion, the horses in panic, the unseated riders. No need to retrace the taunting path by which I, after a boast thoughtlessly uttered for Alexis, accepted their joint dare to go down to the switchbox and plunge that hall into blackness. I lack courage. I reneged at the box itself. I returned to our seats. They were gone.

This was the Alexis I now saw—her steamy gaze and the hidden smile identical to the ones bestowed on me at the horse show as she provoked me, as she planned her escape with Milo Cagle. And then I heard her wild laughter as I walked down the stairs on the night of her marriage.

The consummate details of this latest plan! Milo insulting me from his Carmaletti, giving Alexis reason to visit me with her omnibus apologies, to offer promise of herself, to coerce me into rental of the cabin. And, finally, who but good old Crenshaw was eyewitness to his accidental death? Catch the *both* of them sipping Argentine wine with a hundred thousand to play with; see my loft and the filth and penury and—

"It was quite definitely suicide," I began. "He didn't fall, he jumped—"

"That's a lie!" she screamed, and she came at me. Thank God for Goodson's presence . . .

The profanity. The scathing hatred. It only bears out what I told Soames: inside her was a deviousness, a cruelty every bit as heartless as Milo's. Soames knew even less than I did about women. Fortunately he is in Australia. In his cups he is not always discreet.

I do well. Milo can't come home. She scrabbles for carfare. I have the means now to pay *her* to sit for *me*. I believe she is reassessing the priorities. Cagle the rich playboy was one thing; Cagle, broke, exiled on a phony passport and under indictment, is quite another.

She comes to see me daily. Last week she smiled and yesterday she washed her own coffee cup. Regrettably my modeling fees do not *quite* cover her rent and groceries. It is possible she may move in with me.

Alexis on a life-size canvas—*tout nu et sans défense?*

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Very well; let's try the experiment.

The first three titles of our four-book agenda for this month are quite safe. Beginning with an admirable new detective novel by one of the great masters, who is also editor-in-chief of this magazine, our second title sweeps us into high-powered European espionage *cum* Satanism with American protagonists. The third novel, adventure-thriller (American hero, British heroine), penetrates very far afield both in motive and in action, though physically it penetrates no deeper than brawling Algeria.

And our fourth title? Ah, that's it. That's the experiment.

"Experiment?" you may well burst out in annoyance. "What's all this about an experiment?"

The question will answer itself as we proceed. In *A Fine and Private Place* by Ellery Queen (World, $5.95) Ellery and his father face a situation which, apparently originating in sheer emotion, becomes a classic murder problem of the grisliest kind.

No modern father, we are told, could sell his daughter into matrimonial slavery according to Victorian custom: not even a father like improvident, aristocratic Wallace Ryerson Whyte, whose beautiful daughter, Virginia, has caught the eye of Billionaire Nino Importuna, three times her age and of no enviable temper.

But Whyte, his crooked ways as natural as his charm, is blackmailed into arranging it. If Virginia remains Nino's wife for five years, according to the marriage contract, she will inherit everything.

And Nino's scheme seems successful. Despite a husband with life ruled by his own superstitions, despite the fact that she herself has fallen hard for young Peter Ennis, remain his wife Virginia does until the deadline is past. Nino's two brothers have already met violent deaths. Then, with that fifth anniversary just attained, Nino himself is dramatically slain as though for the whoop of a cosmic jeer. Enter our son-with-father detective team. This book, with its dazzling display of crooked trails and straight clues, shows yet again how well its author deserves to be called a master.

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In David St. John's *The Sorcerers* (Fawcett, 75¢), paperback reprint of some notable espionage first published two years ago, Washington Attorney Peter Ward has been commissioned for undercover work by one of those government undercover agencies designed to end trouble at the start. Though American security forces work with Canadian, there have been ugly moves in Canada; no doubt a leak, with Russia's K.G.B. as active as ever.

The daughter of a Canadian government V.I.P. has vanished without a trace from her exclusive school in Switzerland. Peter Ward must find lovely Diane, restore her, and set all things right. Finding Diane, even after a wild chase across Europe, proves less difficult than holding her when she is found. But to Ward the girl is worth this difficulty or any difficulty.

Our dance of espionage, background Paris, becomes a dance of Satanism as lurid as though Old Nick himself led the reel. At the climax we are blown skyward towards an ending as satisfactory to us as to any of the other good guys on our side. For action, my brethren, you can't beat this one.

Though dealing with international shell games as well as with mystery-adventure, *Assignation in Algeria*, by John Lee (Walker, $5.95), may be listed among the latter. You must meet Brian Douglas, American newsman with base in Spain. Meet Zalie, that alluring English girl. Meet Rick Forrester, lanky South African with too-large teeth and too-ready smile. Off on his mission, Douglas must do what he can against thrice-crooked odds.

But never mind. "Courage!" some voice seems to be whispering through the heat of conflict. "There will be other problems to solve, other beaches to lie on, other drinks to taste." So be it. With the cloak and dagger, fortunately, tomorrow always comes.

That's three novels dealt with, and no fourth. What do we do?

In recommending this anthology of criminous criticism, *The Mystery Writer's Art*, edited by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. (Bowling Green University Press: paperback, $3.50; hardcover, $8.95), be sure I don't confuse you with the 'average' reader. Were you the average reader, sir or madam, you would not be following this column, perhaps not even this magazine. You have special interest in, almost a passion for, mystery and the ways of mystery. Here between covers, set down by those who know and love their field, you will find research, history, theory's immense challenge. No vengeful lightning-bolt will strike as you read, but only sweet airs attend.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 359th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an impressive "first story"—disturbing, chilling, compelling . . .

The author, Mary Louise Downer, is married to Daniel Bush Downer, a producer of industrial and business films. They have four children, all (at the time of this writing) in school, from 8th grade to postgraduate work in Washington, D.C. Mrs. Downer, a graduate of Pomona College, Claremont, California, has been a reporter and columnist for the "Los Angeles Times," has just finished a juvenile historical novel, and is now embarked on an adult mystery novel set in Spain. She and her family spend much of their time, summer and winter, in their mountain cabin on Lake Arrowhead, yet manage to travel extensively throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, Alaska, and Europe . . . Now, read her haunting "first story" . . .

AFTER THE LIGHTS ARE OUT

by MARY LOUISE DOWNER

Henry Holdsworthy felt the sweat break out in the palms of his hands as he began to thread the film into the projector, and he was grateful for the concentration it took to get the film aligned just right. With the sweat, the fear inside him began to grow, swelling like mildewed wheat, and as rotten and sour-tasting. There was no way he could get out of showing the film; he had resigned himself to that.

From the long couch in front of him came a scream of laughter. "Oh, Milly! You didn't! Honestly, I wouldn't have dared. Would I have dared, George?"

The answer was fervent. "Not bloody likely."

Henry unsteadily poked the end of the film into its slot. His wife, Milly, must have finally finished telling another of her

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stories about her adventures abroad. He never listened any more. However, he could see Milly's best friend, Addie Martin, hanging on every word, although she must have heard it all a dozen times before. Addie's husband, George, seemed to have dozed off.

Over the whispers there was another burst of laughter. Henry wondered if Milly was telling her story about swimming on the Riviera and being spied on by a notorious Arabian monarch, who thereafter coveted her for his harem. Or maybe it was the story about that time in Istanbul when she daringly outwitted the white slavers.

In reality, the Arabian monarch had been a turbaned waiter from their hotel on his way home to wife and kiddies, and the white slavers only two bewildered street peddlers trying to sell her a rug.

Addie was still shrieking like a Greek chorus of one. "Milly! You'd be a riot to travel with. Isn't she a riot to travel with, Henry?"

"A riot," Henry answered.

To postpone the moment when the room would be plunged into darkness and the screen would come to life he said, "How about a drink before we start? Addie? George?"

Addie roguishly wagged a bony finger at him. "Oh, I couldn't possibly. After such a *delicious* and different kind of dinner—your dinner was just delicious, Milly, and so *different*. Wasn't it, George?"

George measured off six inches in the air. "Just a short one, Henry. Thanks."

"Oh, you're just terrible, George," Addie shrilled. "Isn't he just terrible, Henry?"

In the butler's pantry Henry poured four fingers of bourbon into a glass and gulped it down. He refilled the glass, added some ice, and taking another deep swig—from the bottle this time—served George his drink. Milly was in the middle of her tale about the time in the Islands when she joined the natives in a Tahitian dance. Henry wished he had brought the bottle back with him.

"Something just seemed to come over me—you know how I am," Milly was saying. "All those magnificent brown bodies and the drums and—well, before Henry realized what I was doing, I had kicked off my shoes and was right up there in the middle of everything."

"Oh, Milly! You're too much. Isn't she too much, Henry?"

"Too much," agreed Henry.

"It isn't hard to do, you know." Milly jumped up to

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demonstrate. "You just shake everything you have just as fast as you can." She winked at George. "It's why natives always look so happy."

"And they always do, too," Addie came in right on cue. "We've noticed how happy natives always look. Haven't we, George?"

"Just another short one, Henry," said George.

It was, of course, after the lights were out that the terror began. Henry sat very still. Waiting. Beside him the machine whirred softly, and across the room the little rectangle of screen flickered and flashed.

Out of the dark came Milly's well-rehearsed narration. "This was the most exciting trip Henry and I have ever taken. Henry had always wanted to go back to New Guinea—he was there during the war, you know." Complacent giggle. "I think he just wanted to see if I could still compete with those native girls he was always writing about. Right, Henry? Well, I showed him. Wait till you see me with a bone through my nose."

"Oh, Milly," squealed Addie. "You didn't *actually*. George, you don't think she *actually*?"

"Well—" said George.

"Now that's the port of Lae. If you watch closely you can see me getting off the plane—Henry wanted to record my first step on New Guinea soil. There! Did you see? I was standing right there between those two darling pilots . . . Now that's our room at the hotel. See me waving? The room overlooked the gardens, and the flowers were just gorgeous. See, aren't the flowers gorgeous?"

It had started again. This time Henry pinpointed the exact moment. As the scarlet and coral splash of flowers appeared on the screen, the room turned cold and was filled with a heavy scent, moist and overpowering, like stepping into a florist shop, or going to a funeral. No one else seemed to notice.

Milly was chattering on. ". . . There I am with the bone through my nose. You get them at the hotel gift shop, you know—"

"She did it! She actually did it! Did you see, George?"

"I see," said George.

". . . And that's our guide; Pieter Van-something-or-other. Isn't he the handsomest thing? And so virile—what I could tell you! I must say he didn't seem to find me unattractive either. Did he, Henry? *Henry.*"

"No, not unattractive," Henry echoed. He kept his eyes fixed on the screen. Repulsive, was more like it. All that

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simpering and posturing and those fat white knees. Both he and Pieter had drunk a lot that trip.

He tensed his muscles. Right on schedule the air began to hum and vibrate. The walls of the room seemed to shift slightly—nothing he could see, just a feeling that there had been a subtle reorganization of space.

"George, look at that," Addie twittered. "The guide put his arm around Milly. Henry, did you actually let the guide put his arm around Milly?"

"Sometimes," murmured Henry. He wiped his damp hands along his trousers, and felt the cold begin to creep upward. He got up and moved to the back of the room. Very carefully he pressed his spine against the wall.

". . . Pieter just couldn't keep his hands off me, poor dear," Milly was saying. "He couldn't do enough for me. He even took me to see the secret ceremony of the Gourd Men. Didn't he, Henry?"

"Dear God," Henry whispered to himself. "That's what he did, all right."

He closed his eyes, remembering. He had paid virile, handsome Pieter $100 to take them to that secret ceremony. Pieter had looked frightened when Henry first suggested it. Then, when he saw the money, he looked frightened and greedy. "Look," Henry had told him. "Every trip I take—same old pictures everyone else gets. I want something different this time. Come on. I'll make it worth your while."

Pieter's eyes glittered and he licked his lips nervously. "But it's taboo." His voice was hoarse. "If we were discovered, and with a woman—" He shuddered. "It means death for a woman."

"I don't intend to take Milly with us, and besides, with my camera we won't have to get too near. I'll use the telescopic lens." He had riffled the wad of bills and laid them in Pieter's lap. "What do you say?"

Of course Pieter had finally agreed, as Henry knew he would; and, as he had feared, Milly refused to be left behind. "A fertility rite," she cried. "Don't be a fool, Henry. I'm going and that's final."

They made their trek into the Highlands, a day's march from a tiny village, along trails that were mere threads lacing the forest. They found the ceremonial ring in a clearing in a small valley that was called, Pieter told them, "The-place-on-the-ground-where-the-eye-in-the-sky-watches-the-people-down-below-so-take-no-risks"—

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or words to that effect. They settled into a strangely fragrant thicket of giant Croton about one hundred yards from the clearing where there was a clear view of the fire ring. Pieter absolutely refused to go any closer.

Milly's voice wrenched Henry back to the present. "Addie, George. Watch closely, everyone. The ceremony is about to start. A fertility rite, Pieter said."

"A fertility rite," Addie whispered. "Did you hear that, George? Milly actually saw a fertility rite."

"I heard," said George.

Henry stared at the screen. The Gourd Men, decked out in paint and cockatoo feathers, appeared just as he had seen them that day in the hidden valley. The circle of fire burned orange and red, burnishing the Gourd Men's spears and their glistening brown bodies as they danced . . .

After they returned to the village Henry had bought one of those spears—bought it from a man with crafty eyes who followed him around until Henry paid the outrageous price just to get rid of him. Henry had never been one for souvenirs, but Milly was delighted—said it was a conversation piece and hung it over the fireplace when they returned home. It gleamed at him now in the light from the flickering screen.

". . . now these are the closeups. Aren't they exciting? Look at that old fellow. It's as if you could reach right out and touch him."

With that Henry was plunged deep in his nightmare. He pressed his back hard against the wall as the room began to revolve. Slowly at first—it was always the same; but he knew the room would spin faster and faster until—until what? So far the film had always ended before the chaos overwhelmed him. But each time the uncanny sensations became stronger . . .

Amazingly, the first time he had shown the film to Milly's mother and assorted relatives, he had noticed nothing unusual. Utterly engrossed in the color and barbaric costuming, elated that at last he had something truly different—something without Milly hogging the foreground—he had accepted congratulations on his technical skill and daring.

Just as he was falling asleep that night he suddenly remembered that Milly's mother had said, "Isn't our little girl the bravest thing? If you had gotten any closer, they would surely have seen you." And Milly had answered, "Oh, don't be silly, Mother. The telescopic lens

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makes it look closer than it really was." Lying there in bed, a wave of nameless fear washed over him.

Milly didn't know. There had been no telescopic lens. In his eagerness, that day in the New Guinea Highlands, he had forgotten to take the lens and had been ashamed to confess his stupidity. He sat up. So what did they mean about closeups?

Trembling, he had gone back to the living room and begun to run the film once again. This was the time he noted the sudden chill that seemed to start along the floor around his naked ankles, and how the scent of flowers pervaded the room. But, since he was fresh from a warm bed and since Milly's mother, an avid gardener, had set bouquets of homegrown flowers all over the house, it seemed only natural. Then.

He remembered how he had pulled his bathrobe closer when the Gourd Men appeared on the screen. Round and round they shuffled, single file, eyes straight ahead, brandishing their spears in random, jerky movements. They looked little and far away, just as he had photographed them. He began to relax.

Then, to his horror, he saw the change begin. He felt the walls stir, felt a sensation of vertigo as the room began to turn about him. Slowly, slowly, the figures on the screen began to enlarge. It was as if the space between them and Henry had begun to dissolve. That was the only way to describe it. The foreground simply melted away, and he and the dancers were drawn irresistibly closer and closer together.

Reason deserted him, and he sat frozen until the film reached the end, and the slapping of the celluloid against the reel roused him. Too stunned to move, he set about convincing himself that it had been some trick of lighting, some distortion of the atmosphere like a mirage. That was it, he told himself. A mirage.

The next showing of the film was a few nights later to Milly's bridge club. To a woman they sighed and giggled at her descriptions of Pieter's virility. And once again Henry suddenly became conscious of the cold, of the scent of flowers. Only this time there were no flowers, and the fireplace spewed warmth. Then, as the room began to wheel, he realized something new was happening.

In the first place, the enlargement of the dancers occurred almost immediately. But that was only a part. One of the Gourd Men, an old chief

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whose sinewy arms were corded with muscle under his dark skin, whose nose and ears were pierced with bone, suddenly swung his heavy head as he passed through the picture. It was as if he had glimpsed something from the corner of his eye and was turning to look.

"Milly," Henry said, after the bridge-club girls had departed, "perhaps we shouldn't be showing this film. After all, it was a secret ceremony and we had no right—"

"Don't be a fool, Henry," she said. "It's the best film we have. You're just jealous of Pieter. That's it, isn't it?"

In spite of Milly, Henry knew he had to do something. He cut those frames of the old chief out of the film, splicing the gap smoothly. But it was no use.

During the next showing to a group of neighbors Henry saw a hooded medicine man, who had followed on the heels of the now eliminated chief, turn to stare right into the camera. The glittering eyes seemed to search out and find Henry as he sat cowering in the dark.

It was then Henry realized the entire film would have to be destroyed. But when he gathered up his equipment after their neighbors had left, he discovered the can containing the New Guinea film was missing. He began a frantic search.

"For heaven's sakes," Milly hissed. "What's your problem? I loaned the film to Bernice to show her brother—you weren't the only one in New Guinea during the war, you know. She's going to give it back to Addie and George to bring with them when they come here for dinner tomorrow night so we can show it to them." She glared at him with narrowed eyes. "You've been drinking again. I've told you over and over how I feel about your drinking."

"I may even get drunk," said Henry.

But he hadn't. He paced the floor all that long sleepless night. And today had seemed endless. All day he had tried desperately to retrieve the film. At the Martins' no one had answered his phone calls; no one had been home when he went by the house.

This evening he had arranged to be at the door when the Martins arrived, but Milly snatched the can of film from his hands. "I'll take charge of that," she said. "Henry has some funny idea that we shouldn't show this film any more."

Feeling the coldness of their eyes, Henry had sighed. "It's all right. I'll show it . . ."

Suddenly Henry was jerked

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from his brooding by the awareness that the screen was being flooded with a pulsing intensity of color. The action was speeding up.

Henry clung to the wall, flattening himself against its hard reality. He felt himself the center of a vortex. The humming in his ears grew louder, and above the humming there emerged a sound of chanting. Faster and faster the circling dancers whirled until they merged in a blurring of light.

Out of the blur Henry saw a figure struggle to take form. As if feeding on the distorted radiance, the figure seemed to gather strength. It loomed larger and larger. It began to detach itself from the screen. Henry saw it take a step out into the room. It raised its arm. A spear glittered.

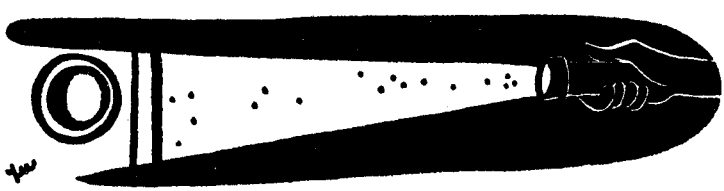
"Look out!" yelled Henry, and lunged forward.

The jury admitted it was a hard case to decide, and the final verdict—that Milly Holdsworthy and Addie Martin had been stabbed to death by an unknown assailant—may always be in doubt.

The jury did agree that robbery must have been the motive, for the room was ransacked, and it was a miracle that both husbands had survived the vicious attack.

It was only natural that Henry and George were the prime suspects, at first. But they were unshakable in their corroboration of each other's innocence.

Besides, the fingerprints on the bloody spear that killed Milly and Addie belonged to neither Henry nor George.



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a **NEW** ***Dr. Coffee detective*** **NOVELET** ***by***

LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

The brutal murder, by strangulation, of Dr. Virginia Vaught, staff orthopedist at Northbank's Pasteur Hospital, gave Dr. Coffee a bad time—emotionally even more than professionally. Dr. Vaught had been a "sort of protégée" of Dr. Coffee, pathologist and chief of laboratory services at Pasteur Hospital, and more recently she had been a colleague. It was difficult, to say the least, to perform an autopsy on a former protégée-colleague. And then there was the disturbing factor of the prime suspect, All-American, Vietnam-veteran Booker T. Washington Jones . . .

Another new medical mystery, as up to date as this morning's newspaper, about the modern-day scientific sleuth, Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, ably assisted by Dr. Motilal Mookerji, and working like perfectly meshed gears with Lieutenant Max Ritter of Northbank's Homicide Squad . . .

DR. COFFEE AND THE AMATEUR ANGEL

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

An anonymous phone call to police headquarters brought a squad car to the Northbank Medical Arts Building at 6:30 P.M. to investigate some unusual goings-on in Dr. Virginia Vaught's fifth-floor office. The officers who responded found the door to the doctor's suite open, the deserted waiting room dark, the nurse-receptionist gone, and a light burning in one of the examining rooms. On the floor beside the padded table Dr. Virginia Vaught lay dead, apparently strangled. Her face was the dusky blue of cyanosis.

"Don't you touch that phone," ordered one of the officers. "Go down to the car and call Homicide."

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The crew of photographers, print men, and sundry technicians of the Northbank Police Department Homicide Squad arrived simultaneously with Max Ritter, Lieutenant of Detectives. Lieutenant Ritter made a quick visual survey of the physical evidence, then found a telephone that had already been dusted for fingerprints and called Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee at Pasteur Hospital. Dr. Coffee, pathologist and chief of laboratory services at Pasteur, was Max Ritter's personal and private Medical Examiner in puzzling homicide cases.

The pathology lab did not answer. Ritter called Dr. Coffee's home number and was informed that the pathologist was in Columbus giving a lecture to the local medical society. Was there any message?

"Yes," said Lieutenant Ritter. "Mrs. Coffee, will you tell your husband that I'm sending a body over to Pasteur tonight, and that I have an okay from the Coroner for him to do an autopsy in the morning. He will be back in the morning, won't he? . . . Good. Tell him Max Ritter called. I'll be in touch with him later."

Ritter first looked through the appointment book he found on the receptionist's desk. He slipped the book into his pocket, then stepped outside and pushed the elevator button. He wanted to talk to the operator, a boy with a brace on one leg.

"You been on this car for how long?" the detective asked.

"Since four this afternoon."

"Who was the last man you brought up to Dr. Vaught's floor? You know him?"

"Yes, sir. It was Booker T. Washington Jones."

"You sure of that?"

"Positive. Who don't know Booker T. Washington Jones?"

"Where did you ever see him before?"

"Right here in this car. He's been coming up here to see Dr. Vaught every day or so. Late, usually, after her regular office hours, like after Mrs. Gustafson has gone home."

"Who's Mrs. Gustafson?" Ritter asked.

"She's Dr. Vaught's receptionist."

"Tell me again how you knew that the last man who got off at this floor before the police came was Booker T. Washington Jones."

"I used to see him on teevee," said the boy. "And I seen his picture in the papers when he was the greatest running back in the conference and made everybody's All-American. That was before he went to Vietnam, but I still

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remembered him. I ast him for his autograph last week."

"Okay," said Ritter. "So you brought him up to Dr. Vaught's floor. What time, about?"

"About six fifteen."

"And what time did you take him down?"

The elevator boy puckered his lips. "Now you mention it," he said, "I don't think I took him down."

"You don't *think?*"

"I don't remember taking him down. No, I didn't take him down. I'm sure of it."

Lieutenant Ritter accepted the elevator operator's statement—until he could prove it false.

When the technicians had finished with establishing the relationship of the late Dr. Vaught in respect to the murder scene, someone from the Coroner's office—the Coroner himself was off in Boone County electioneering—authorized the transportation of the body to the morgue of Pasteur Hospital to await post-mortem examination. Simultaneously Max Ritter had finished reading Dr. Vaught's appointment book. There had been no patients listed for later than 5:00 P.M. Booker T. Washington Jones was not listed at all.

For confirmation, Ritter ascertained the address of Nancy Gustafson, Dr. Vaught's nurse-receptionist, and drove out to a genteel neighborhood that was halfway between a deteriorating middle-class collection of red-brick two-family houses and an incipient slum. He rang the bell.

The door was opened by Mr. Sven Gustafson, a tall thin fair-haired Scandinavian type—a professional masseur at the Northbank Athletic Club. The detective caught sight of what he assumed to be his wife, a flash of flame-colored negligee disappearing behind a rapidly closing door. Nancy was almost as tall as her husband and twice as wide, a dark-eyed Amazon with black hair severely parted in the middle and falling straight to her shoulders.

"Mr. Gustafson? I'm Lieutenant Ritter, Northbank Police Homicide Squad. I wanna talk to your wife."

"My wife? She's retired. She's been rundown lately. Anyhow what has my wife got to do with homicide?"

"Your wife's Nancy Gustafson, receptionist for a Dr. Virginia Vaught?"

"Yes, but—"

"Dr. Vaught's been murdered."

Gustafson recoiled as though he had been struck in the face. He backed away quickly until

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the edge of a chair caught his hamstrings. He collapsed instantly and buried his face in his hands.

"Murdered?" he exclaimed. "Oh, no, my God, no! How—?"

Nancy Gustafson reappeared suddenly. She was still in her flaming negligee but her hair was now brushed back over her ears. Her dark eyes flashed and her chin advanced defiantly.

"You've got to be kidding," she said to Ritter. Then with a half-pitying, half-contemptuous look at her husband, she added, "This man's crazy, Gus. Dr. Vaught was her usual laughing self when I left her this evening. I didn't know that you were that devoted to Dr. Vaught, Gus, for it to hit you like this."

Gustafson raised his head. "Nancy, how can you be so cold-blooded—"

"I don't believe a word this cop says," said Nancy.

"What time did you leave the doctor's office this evening, Nancy?" Ritter asked.

"Five thirty as usual. Maybe a few minutes earlier because her five o'clock patient only came in for a booster flu shot, and was gone in a few minutes."

"No appointments after five thirty?"

"No."

"But the doctor stayed on after you left?"

"Well, yes. She was waiting for this man who's been coming around after hours lately."

"Was his name Booker T. Washington Jones?"

"Something like that. Dr. Vaught didn't have a regular card for him. She always treated him as a special case, for some reason."

"You didn't agree he was something special?"

"I never gave it any thought. She never asked my opinion. She never asked my opinion on anything."

Nancy Gustafson made a strange face in her husband's direction. "She probably wouldn't have liked some of my ideas."

"Then you don't have an address for Booker T. Washington Jones, since he didn't have a regular card?"

"I didn't say that," Nancy said. "I don't know where he lives, but I know where you can get in touch with him. Through his probation officer."

"Oh, yeah?" Lieutenant Ritter's large ears seemed to move. His outsize Adam's apple did move. "What's he busted for?"

"He's a hophead." Nancy's long eyelashes drooped demurely. But her half smile was more smug than demure.

Ritter mumbled a few words of thanks, spoke of his desire

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for more conversation later, took a long last look at the fair-haired Gustafson, and started for the door.

He paused with one hand on the knob, turned and said, "I won't ask, but if you still got any doubts about Dr. Vaught being murdered, just call the morgue at Pasteur Hospital."

Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee had never approached an autopsy with less enthusiasm. For many years a post-mortem examination had been chiefly a scientific problem, sometimes simple, often challenging, but always impersonal. It was hard to exclude human reactions completely, however, when the nude body awaiting the prosector's knife on the stainless-steel table was that of a woman he had known and greatly admired.

Virginia Vaught, M.D., as the tag attached to one big toe identified the body, had been an intern at Pasteur Hospital ten—or was it twelve?—years ago. She had caught the attention of Dr. Coffee during the pathologist's weekly conference with residents and interns, going over the more puzzling of recent cases requiring clinic-laboratory cooperation. He had been struck by her quick mind, her penetrating questions, her instinct for projecting a whole medical picture from a few symptoms. No doubt about it. She would make a brilliant diagnostician, no matter what specialty she later chose.

He must also have been attracted, he now realized as he steeled himself to make the first incision in the pathetic figure, by her feminine charm. She was a small woman—petite had been the word he used when he thought of her, as he often had in the intervening years—gray-eyed, her chestnut hair trimmed to a boyishness that could not dilute the fact that she was very much a woman. Perhaps it was only his memory-prompted imagination, but something of her charm persisted despite the lividity that veiled her dead face.

Dr. Coffee knew he would find all the other symptoms of strangulation—pinpoint hemorrhages in the scalp and eyelids, congested lungs, probably fractured hyoid and thyroid cartilage; but he was nevertheless determined to proceed with the most detailed and thorough autopsy possible. He wanted to do everything he could to help identify and convict the murderer of Virginia Vaught.

There was no doubt that Virginia had been murdered. Max Ritter, who had awakened Dr. Coffee at the crack of dawn

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to insist on an autopsy, had promised to bring the pathologist up to date on his investigation if he would join him at lunch.

The pathologist had still not made the first incision. He knew he could not delay any longer, yet he continued to hesitate. He picked up one cold slender hand and looked at the fingers. There was sometimes marked lividity of the fingers in cases of strangulation.

Suddenly he dropped his knife and bent to examine Virginia's fingernails. Those of the right hand were dark with some material imbedded underneath. If it were partly dried blood he saw a potentially important clue. He stooped to recover his knife, crossed the room, and picked up the house phone.

"Give me pathology lab," he told the operator. "Hello, Dr. Mookerji? I need you in the basement. Yes, now. Bring down a dozen sterile test tubes."

Raoul's, the restaurant at which the French chefs from the Barzac Soup Cannery ate lunch, was on the wrong side of the tracks and one flight up. It was also a favorite place for Dr. Coffee and Lieutenant Ritter to exchange notes whenever the Pasteur Hospital pathologist was acting as unofficial Medical Examiner for the Northbank police department which under the law was still dependent on an elected Coroner to determine the cause of sudden and unexplained death.

Ritter was already seated, making patterns with a growing pile of crusty French-bread crumbs on the red-checked tablecloth when Dr. Coffee arrived.

"Hi, Doc," the detective said. "Sorry I couldn't reach you last night when this thing popped. It looks like we got a real toughie this time."

"It's been a hard morning for me, Max." The pathologist shook his head. "This gal used to be sort of a protégée of mine."

"Raoul says you phoned ahead to order sweetbreads. I told him to put a bottle of that Livermore Valley Pinot Chardonnay on ice. Okay, Doc?"

"Sure, Max. Who killed Dr. Virginia Vaught and why? The morning papers say you already know."

"They're wrong, Doc." A deep wrinkle bisected the detective's swarthy forehead. "We got a guy locked up—a big ex-GI called Booker T. Washington Jones. The D.A. wants the grand jury to indict him day before yesterday, but I tell him he better keep his socks up till

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you finish your PM. Something don't smell quite right to me. What did you find, Doc, when you took the lady medic apart this morning?"

There was a pause while Raoul, the red-faced mustachioed proprietor, poured the topaz-colored wine. Then Dr. Coffee replied, "So far there's only one certainty, Max. She died of manual strangulation. There are two interesting probabilities, though: that she was unconscious when the murderous hands closed around her throat, and that before she blacked out she put up quite a fight. She may, in fact, have tagged your murderer for you. Who, besides Booker T. Washington Jones, are your favorite candidates for the electric chair?"

Ritter told him about his visit to the Gustafsons and his subsequent arrest of Jones.

"I want to hear more about Jones," the pathologist said, "but first tell me more about Virginia Vaught. When I first knew her she was Virginia Burton. She interned at Pasteur, and she was as bright as she was cute. She married a classmate from medical school, Joe Case, a so-so student who turned out to be a so-so doctor. A great deal of professional jealousy developed on his part and the marriage broke up, or rather petered out when he got a job as corporation doctor for some steel firm in Pittsburgh. I suppose she divorced him and married somebody named Vaught."

"No," said Ritter. "There's another husband in between. Seems like she was sort of addicted to husbands. For a year or so she was married to a young public-health officer named Harrison Bell. When she chucked him, she married Vaught, the big love of her life. He was an airline pilot, but he was also in the Air Force Reserve. He got called to active duty and shipped to Vietnam. The Charlies shot him down before he'd been there a month."

Virginia's world collapsed, according to Ritter who had apparently done his research in depth. She immediately shut up shop in Northbank, turned her practice over to a colleague, and volunteered for overseas service with the Medical Corps.

For two years she had given of herself entirely, as though her whole-hearted devotion could in some way bring back Bill Vaught. She worked twelve, fourteen hours a day, mending broken GIs. Assigned to base hospitals, she wheedled her way by 'copter to field stations whenever she could. She seemed to be in love with

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danger and courting death, as though she owed somebody a sacrifice to match Bill Vaught's. She thumbed her nose at the brass and its regulations—until she was shipped out of Vietnam to Okinawa.

Deprived of her reckless exposure to enemy action, she supplemented her long hours of devotion to the physically wounded by offering herself recklessly to the emotionally wounded, the lonely, the disoriented. It was as if she felt a compulsion to redistribute the tremendous reserve of love and tenderness that had been dammed up when Bill Vaught was shot down.

A jealous nurse put an end to her philanthropy with a word to the commanding general. Virginia was summarily ordered home.

Curiously, the two years torn from her life proved an antidote and a catharsis. She was able to turn her back, not only on her personal tragedy, but on the nightmarish years that had followed. She resumed her hospital connections as staff orthopedist and reopened her office to general practice again. She found herself able to return to what people had called normalcy. She was no longer addicted to husbands. Men, as far as she was concerned, were again no more than friends or patients. She thought she was again firmly entrenched in the old routine when Booker T. Washington Jones reappeared.

"Before you start on Jones," Dr. Coffee interrupted, "let's get Raoul to pour some more wine."

Max Ritter had no objection. He had done a thorough job of homework on Jones, too.

Booker T. Washington Jones was a graduate of Northbank University. Although a big bruiser, he had been the fastest running back N.U. had ever seen. He made everybody's All-American team. Half a dozen professional football teams were after him—in vain. When he was graduated, he lost his student deferment, and pro football was not considered an essential occupation. When he was offered an appointment to Officers Candidate School he grabbed it.

The Army may have been thinking of making a morale officer out of Jones, but he preferred combat. He was a second lieutenant commanding an infantry platoon near the Laotian border when a grenade in a booby trap shattered his right knee, and, with it, any future he may have dreamed of in pro football.

He was lucky that his base hospital had available such an expert orthopedic surgeon as

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Virginia Vaught. She saved his leg for him, and she rebuilt his knee joint so he would not be a hopeless cripple. But it was a long and excruciatingly painful process. For weeks he was kept under opiates, and even after the first agony was assuaged, he had frequent bouts of torture that called for injections of the most powerful anodynes. By the time he was out of the home-side hospital and out of the Army, he was hooked.

For sentimental reasons Northbank University had hired him as an assistant backfield coach. But when the local Narcotics Squad caught him making a purchase from a known pusher and booked him for possession, the university authorities lost all interest. Again for sentimental reasons, discreet intervention by the athletic department successfully assured clemency for Jones—a suspended sentence and probation—and managed to smother all newspaper mention, for the good of the university. But Jones's contract as assistant backfield coach was forthwith dissolved by mutual consent, also for the good of the university.

A few weeks later Jones was arrested again while trying to hold up a pharmacist with a toy pistol to commandeer his stock of morphine. This time there were headliness: *Star Halfback Nabbed in Holdup . . . War Hero Held As Addict . . . Wounded Black Vet Jailed for Armed Robbery . . .*

The headlines caught the attention of Dr. Virginia Vaught and transported her back through the barriers of time and her regained normalcy to the blood and stinks and shattered men, to the unreality of her Asian delirium. Booker T. Washington Jones was her responsibility. It was she who had ordered the first shots of morphine because *she* had been unable to stand *his* suffering. Now she went to the police, the District Attorney, and the judge who had granted him probation in the first place. She put up bail for him and made herself guarantor for his good behavior and appearance in court. Meanwhile, she put him on methadone. He would be free of the craving for the hard stuff by the time he came to trial. Since she was the one who had started him on opiates, she would get him off it.

Jones was deeply touched. He would come to her office after hours for his methadone and a touch of psychotherapy. He was regaining his self-assurance. He began to feel human again, even if he did have a cast-iron knee . . .

"But, Max," said Dr. Coffee,

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"it doesn't make sense. Why should *he* kill Dr. Vaught, the very person who once saved his leg, who was giving him back his life?"

"Good question," said Ritter, "but the D.A. thinks he has the answer. Jones is a hophead, with a record of two arrests. He's unhappy with methadone, the D.A. says, because all it does is keep him from climbing walls. It don't give him the kicks he gets from the real McCoy. He's helping himself to the goodies in Virginia's narcotics chest when she walks in and catches him. So he kills her."

"Jones denies it, of course," Dr. Coffee murmured.

"Natch. He ain't exactly in a talking mood, what with being cut off from his kicks. He's sweating blood, he shakes, and his hair hurts, but he still denies he was even in Virginia's office yesterday, even if the elevator boy says he was the last one to get off at the fifth floor before the cops got there."

"But the boy doesn't remember taking him down again?"

"Nope."

"Maybe the boy's mistaken."

"He swears he could never be mistaken about a guy he's seen on teevee so often, including the ninety-three-yard runback of a punt that beat Purdue in the Cotton Bowl . . . Then the D.A. thinks the hypo we find on the floor next to the body is another strike against the big guy."

"He's wrong there, Max." Dr. Coffee drained his glass and put it down on the table with a noise like an exclamation point. "That needle was never used for narcotics or anything else. The barrel of the syringe was absolutely sterile inside. Tell me, did you actually see Jones?"

"Sure."

"Did you notice any scratches on his hands or face?"

"Nope."

"What about the other people you've seen? What about Dr. Vaught's receptionist or her husband? Did the Gustafsons have any scratches or adhesive patches on their hands, face, or arms?"

"Not that I noticed."

"Have you seen either of her surviving ex-husbands?"

"Not yet, Doc. I hear Harrison Bell's been in town the last few days, though. I'm checking on both the exes. You think Virginia clawed the guy that killed her?"

"It's highly probable," said Dr. Coffee. "I retrieved partly dried blood from under her fingernails. It was fresh enough so I could make a saline

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solution enough for a dozen test tubes."

"I get it," said Ritter. "You're going to make with the blood types like you did with the sleepwalking prof in the Arlington murder."

"Better than that, Max. Forensic science has learned to do wonderful things with blood analysis since the original four blood groups were identified. The Rh factor has been broken down into nearly thirty subgroups, and at least ten other factors have been discovered on the surface of the red blood cell."

"Pretty soon you'll be able to tell if the blood comes from a man or woman, eh, Doc?" Ritter joked.

"That's not so fantastic as you think, Max. Right now some white cells show irregularities that identify the source as female."

"No kidding."

"I'm sending samples of the blood recovered from under Virginia Vaught's fingernails to Washington, D.C., for examination by Dr. Paul Alepa of the Georgetown University's Forensic Sciences laboratory. Dr. Alepa is one of the top researchers in the field of serum proteins. By a process called electrophoresis he can identify some two dozen protein fractions that produce disease-fighting antibodies. These fractions are hereditary, and some appear only in certain racial subgroups."

"I don't get it all," said Ritter, "but it sounds pretty important. When does Washington report on electro-whatsis and protein-whosis? And what do I do in the meantime?"

"You're the cop, Max. I can only suggest. But I think that after you check on Virginia's ex-husbands you go back to the appointment book and find out from Nancy—what's her name? Gustafson?—if any of Dr. Vaught's patients have died recently, and if some grief-crazed husband—or even wife—has taken divine justice into his own hands. Because I think this is a psychotic murder. The method, strangulation, was apparently spontaneous with a savage, unsuspected strength provoked by some great emotion—hate, jealousy, vengeance. It was not a reasoned plan of robbery gone wrong."

"So we rule out ex-Lieutenant Jones?"

"Not entirely, Max. Not yet. A preliminary microscopic examination of the blood from under Dr. Vaught's fingernails does show a distortion of some of the red cells. It's nothing definitive, but among the blood disorders that are hereditary within racial groups is sickle-cell

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anemia, which seems to affect Africans exclusively. This is only a presumptive opinion. I can't make a diagnosis on the basis of what my own microscope shows. I'll have to wait for word from Washington. Meanwhile I'd like to talk to Jones, and I'd like to try to persuade the D.A. to postpone charging him with homicide.

"Let's have a brandy with our coffee, Max."

The approaches to the Northbank County courthouse and the county jail across the street were as dismal as the approaches to Dante's Inferno. The streets were lined with bail-bond brokers, those shifty-eyed cigar-chewing predators sleeping in their glass cages, communing with their kind on the sidewalks, or waiting to sink their claws into the veins of the weeping relatives of impecunious jailbirds. Booker T. Washington Jones, being held not only for parole violation but on suspicion of felony, was in the county jail.

After a few formalities at the Sheriff's office, Max Ritter escorted Dr. Coffee to the third-tier cell where Jones was sweating out his ordeal.

When the turnkey opened the cell door, Jones did not even look up. He was lying face down on his bunk. He had stripped the shirt from his back, wadded it into a ball, buried his face in it, and was now moaning as he tried to stuff the wadded shirt into his mouth, chewing it like a dog working on a bone.

"Max, this is ridiculous," said Dr. Coffee. "He's in no condition to be interrogated. Call whoever can authorize a transfer to a prison ward in the county hospital, and I'll get the narcotics people out there to put him back on methadone. Get on the phone, Max."

With a last look at the glistening torso of the sweat-bathed prisoner, Dr. Coffee followed Ritter to the Sheriff's office where a deputy grudgingly let them use the telephone.

"Hey, Ritter!" As the detective and the pathologist passed the press room which adjoined the Sheriff's office, a white-haired red-faced gnome got up from behind a typewriter and ambled out the door. "You get your man yet, Ritter?"

"What man?" asked the detective. He knew better than to expect to hoodwink Donovan of the *Northbank Post.* Donovan was an old-time police reporter in "The Front Page" tradition. He didn't like the new breed of journalist with his minimum wage and his nine-to-five Guild contract. Donovan still thought that a newsman

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worth his salt should thumb his nose at union hours and should stick with a story until it was on the city desk, and to hell with overtime.

"Come on, Ritter. Don't give me that. Are you going to charge the big guy with Murder One?"

"Depends on my private Medical Examiner, when he makes with the test tubes. You know Doc Coffee, don't you, Donovan?"

"Sure. The Wizard of Northbank." Donovan looked over his shoulder. The pressroom was nearly empty. He lowered his voice. "Did you know that Harrison Bell has been in town?"

"Yep," said Ritter. "So what?"

"Let's go around the corner where you can buy me a drink," the reporter said. "After all, Ritter, you've given me a break on two-three stories. I'm going to maybe violate a confidence, but I don't like whoever killed Virginia Vaught, so I'm going to cut you in on something you ought to know."

The place around the corner was the Habeas Corpus Bar which, despite its juridical name, smelled of stale beer, poverty, and exploitation. The clientele seemed to be composed exclusively of ageless women with black shawls over their heads, waiting for visiting hours at the county jail, bewildered blacks waiting for their lawyers, and baldheaded bail-bond brokers waiting for whatever might turn up.

"Do you know why Virginia Vaught divorced Harrison Bell?" asked Donovan when the bartender had taken the orders.

"I been wondering," said Ritter, "but the divorce papers are sealed. I hear, though, that the grounds were desertion."

"Technically I suppose they might have been," said Donovan. "In this state, failure to perform or accede to the act of cohabitation is legally desertion."

"Meaning what?" asked Dr. Coffee.

"Meaning that Virginia Bell, as she was then called, divorced her husband because he had fallen in love with a movie actor."

"Did you say actor?" Max Ritter's outsize Adam's apple rose sharply, bobbed briefly, then dropped back into place.

"Actor," said Donovan. "It was a temporary aberration apparently and it was carried on with extreme discretion. Even Walter Winchell didn't hear about it. His wife did, though. And I hear Bell is up for promotion to a big job in the Public Health Service. It's a one-star job—you know how

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PHS officers wear naval uniforms when they dress up—and there's bound to be an updating of his security clearance. So Bell has been checking with the few people in Northbank who know about it, to make sure they have forgotten about the interlude with his Hollywood boy friend."

"You think he checked with his ex-wife?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"I'd say so. I know he checked with me."

"Are you trying to tell me that maybe his ex-wife wouldn't promise him anything, and that he—?"

"I'm not trying to tell you anything," Donovan broke in. "I just want to point out one possible avenue of investigation, just in case you didn't know about it."

"You sure Bell's gone back to Washington?"

"No. He may still be in Northbank. But wherever he is, he wouldn't dare stay away from the funeral, in case you want to talk to him. If you do, I hope you'll keep my name out of this. Thanks for the drink."

Nancy Gustafson had agreed to meet Lieutenant Ritter in Dr. Vaught's office to go over the appointment book. She was wearing a sleeveless white dress, so that Max could also go over her most accessible skin surfaces visually to make sure he hadn't missed any scratches or Band-Aids when he had quizzed her the night of the murder. He hadn't been alerted by Dr. Coffee to look for scratches when he had first seen her. Anyhow, the skin of her arms, face, and throat was unbroken. And she seemed to be a bigger woman than she had appeared to be in the flame-colored negligee.

"Dr. Vaught has lost only two patients in the last few months," said Nancy Gustafson. "One was old Mrs. Shablitz, who broke her hip and died in the hospital. Pneumonia, I think it was. She was eighty years old and had no survivors. Then there was Mrs. Spencer. She'd only been married a year or so; she died of a malignancy. Mr. Spencer was pretty broken up about it because Dr. Vaught told him his wife had a chance of living for two-three years, but she lasted only six months. He didn't hold it against the doctor, though. I'll bet he'll be at the funeral tomorrow."

"You'll be at the funeral, of course?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then you're going to sit with me. We're going to be the first ones there, so you can identify any of Doc Vaught's patients as they come in."

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"Okay, if you say so," said Nancy. "But it won't do you any good. All her patients loved Dr. Vaught. And I guess you could say vice versa."

Booker T. Washington Jones had stopped shaking by the time Ritter and Dr. Coffee were admitted to the prison ward at the county hospital. He did not stop staring at the ceiling when the two men stopped at his bedside.

"How many monkeys on your back today, Jones?" Ritter asked. Jones did not turn his head. "Feel better?"

"Fine," said Jones, still not looking at them.

"Meet Doc Coffee," the detective said. "A friend of Dr. Vaught's."

At last Jones moved. He nodded his head. "Howdy."

"I thought you might be ready to tell me the truth," the pathologist said. "Lieutenant Ritter is not here officially, so whatever you say won't be used against you."

"I got nothing to say."

"You may as well stop insisting that you were not in Dr. Vaught's office on Wednesday. The elevator boy positively recognized you. Why didn't you take the elevator down?"

Jones said nothing. He was beginning to perspire.

"Let me tell you what I think happened," said Dr. Coffee. "You got off at the fifth floor as usual to get your methadone. The door was open and you walked in. There was nobody in the waiting room. Mrs. Gustafson, the receptionist, had already gone home. You walked back to Dr. Vaught's office. She was not there. You went farther down the corridor and through an open door you saw Dr. Vaught lying on the floor. Did you go in to find out if she was dead?"

Jones closed his eyes. A tremor ran through him. He still did not speak.

"So you panicked," Dr. Coffee continued, "and ran down the fire stairs. When you reached the street you began to feel guilty about running away without even trying to find out if Dr. Vaught was still alive. So you ducked into a phone booth and called the police. Am I right?"

A tear seeped from under one closed eyelid and snaked across Jones's brown cheek. He suddenly sat up, his eyes opened wide. He took a deep breath.

"I was scared," he said. "I've never been scared like that, even when the VCs were shooting at me from the trees. With my record, with two arrests and a violation of probation, what chance has a

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black hophead got? Would you believe me?"

"I might," said Dr. Coffee, "if you let me take a sample of your blood." He opened the bag he was carrying and produced a large syringe. "I know you're not afraid of the needle."

The big man swung his feet off the bed, sat up, and smiled wryly. He held out his arm.

"Do you suppose," he said, "that you guys could fix it so that I could go to the funeral? Even if I have to go in handcuffs between two cops."

"The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want . . ."

The minister's resonant baritone rumbled in a monotone as he walked slowly backward down the aisle, two steps ahead of Virginia Vaught's coffin.

The funeral services had been brief and unsentimental. There had been no eulogy. Nancy Gustafson, sitting between Dr. Coffee and Max Ritter, had pointed out fifteen of the dead woman's patients as they came in, none of them with visible scratches or adhesive strips.

Harrison Bell was there, but he wasn't scratched either. He had been able to convince Ritter that he had returned to Washington by the time Dr. Vaught was killed.

Dr. Joe Case, Virginia's first husband, did not come from Pittsburgh for the services. Nobody had thought to wire him, and he apparently did not read the newspapers.

Donovan of the *Post* was there on the off-chance that there might be a break in the murder story. The only incident he had found at all newsworthy was the sight of Booker T. Washington Jones kneeling beside the flower-draped coffin for a full five minutes, his head hidden in his manacled hands, while his two armed escorts stood impatiently beside him.

"Theatrics," Donovan commented orally for the benefit of anyone listening. "Trying to whip up sympathy. Wasted dramatics, as far as the D.A. is concerned. He's going to ask the grand jury to indict Jones tomorrow afternoon."

Max Ritter went back to Pasteur Hospital with Dr. Coffee. The two were greeted by Dr. Motilal Mookerji, Pasteur's brown, egg-shaped resident pathologist, whose ever-present long-tailed pink turban was as picturesque as the chi-chi English he had imported from Calcutta.

"Salaam, Dr. Sahib," he said. "Salaam, Leftenant Ritter. You are in great luck. Oracle has spoken from nation's capital.

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Felonious manhunt is no doubt foreshortened."

"Thanks, Doctor." The pathologist took the special-delivery letter from his resident's plump fingers, tore open the envelope while walking to his office, and extracted three closely typed pages bearing the Georgetown University letterhead. It was a report from Dr. Paul Alepa on the analysis of the blood from under Virginia Vaught's fingernails.

Dr. Coffee read it aloud: " 'You were quite right in your tentative diagnosis of the irregularities in the red blood cells. The shape was not characteristic of sickle-cell anemia.' That's one point for Booker T. Washington Jones," Dr. Coffee interposed.

He went on reading: " 'Beside the poikilocytosis, you probably noticed some stippling of the red blood cells, as well as a marked hypochromic microcytosis—' "

"Come on, Doc," Ritter interrupted. "Translate."

"In addition to finding the red blood cells misshapen, Dr. Alepa found them uneven in coloration. He also noted a large number of pale microcytes, which are similar to red blood cells but about one-third the size. They appear in the blood in certain types of anemia."

"How the hell is all this gonna tip us to the killer?" Ritter demanded. "Or is it?"

"It certainly may," said Dr. Coffee, "if this is leading to a diagnosis of a hereditary hemolytic anemia, as I think it is." The pathologist thumbed through the pages, until he came to the last paragraphs. His mouth opened and his eyes widened. "This should nail him!" he almost shouted. "Listen to this. 'From this defect in the hemoglobin molecule and presence of the above-mentioned protein fraction, I should say definitely that the person is suffering from sub-acute thalassemia minor.' "

"That don't exactly send me," said Ritter. "Should it?"

"Thalassemia," said the pathologist, "is a hereditary disease of the blood peculiar to peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean regions. Greeks and other Levantines are most often the carriers of the genetic trait that causes it, but it also runs in families as far west as Italy. Thalassemia major may be fatal, but our murderer appears to have the less serious type. Do we have any Levantines among our suspects, Max?"

The detective shook his head. "They all seem to be one hundred percent Anglo-Saxon," he said. "They—hold on, now.

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That big dark Nancy Gustafson, Doc Vaught's receptionist—her maiden name was Rossi." He scratched his left ear. "But you saw her yourself, Doc. She ain't scratched."

"Lady was perhaps scratched while in state of nudity," Dr. Mookerji suggested, "making nail marks invisible beneath daytime clothing."

"You know, I've thought of that," said Dr. Coffee, "but then why would the receptionist be undressing or undressed in the doctor's suite? And why on earth would she want to kill Virginia?"

"Let's talk to her husband," said Max Ritter.

Dr. Coffee picked up the phone.

The tall fair-haired masseur walked into Dr. Coffee's office as soon as he could drive over from the Northbank Athletic Club. He shook hands all around.

"I'm glad you called, Doctor," he said, "because I was on the point of telephoning you. Do you know who has charge of Dr. Vaught's records since her death?"

"Why not ask your wife?" Ritter fielded the question. "She has keys to the office."

"Nancy doesn't know anything about this matter I'm interested in. You see, I'd asked Dr. Vaught privately—I suppose you could say secretly—to persuade Nancy to have a thorough physical examination."

"And did she have it?" Dr. Coffee leaned forward expectantly.

"That's just the point," said Gustafson. "I don't know. And I can't ask Nancy, because she doesn't know I've been plotting with Dr. Vaught. You see, I've been worried about Nancy. She hasn't looked well for some time. Her skin has been sort of sallow and lifeless, and she comes home in the evening completely beat. I took Dr. Vaught out to lunch one day and told her how worried I was, and she promised to examine Nancy when she could do it casually, without alarming her. I didn't want her frightened in case she had something serious. She imagines things, you know. But the doctor has been so busy, and she wasn't able to find the right time, I guess. I've been calling up every few days. I hope Nancy didn't recognize my voice."

"When's the last time you phoned Doc Vaught?" Ritter asked.

"The day she was murdered, as a matter of fact," Gustafson said. "That's why I wondered if she'd got around to the examination, and if she left a

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report on it. When I called I just asked her, 'Did you do what you promised yet?' And she answered, 'No, but I'll do it today before she goes home.' "

The deep silence lasted several seconds. It was Dr. Coffee who broke it. He said, "I think it quite possible that Dr. Vaught did start to examine your Nancy. Tell me, Mr. Gustafson, have you noticed any deep parallel scratches on your wife's body?"

Gustafson colored slightly. "No, I haven't, because I haven't seen my wife in the raw these last few days. She's been so upset—"

"Mr. Gustafson," Dr. Coffee asked, "can you think of any reason why your wife might have wanted to kill Dr. Vaught?"

"No, of course not. She—" He stopped. An ashen veil diffused his face. "Oh, my God!" he said. "My God! It's back."

"What's back?" Ritter demanded.

"I'd better tell you." Gustafson shook his head as if to rid himself of bewildering thoughts. "Nancy was in a sanitarium for several months last year for psychotherapy. They said she was mildly paranoid, but she was discharged as completely normal. Do you think—?"

"Did Virginia Vaught know about Nancy's history?"

"Yes. In fact, she was very much interested in Nancy's recovery. Dr. Vaught was very good about helping other people. She was sort of an amateur angel, you might say."

Dr. Coffee got up, walked to the window, and looked out unseeing for a long moment. Ritter, Gustafson, and Dr. Mookerji watched him anxiously in silence.

Finally Dr. Coffee turned away from the window and said, "Mr. Gustafson, I'm afraid you're in for a tragic ordeal. As I see it, Dr. Vaught had convinced your wife that she should be examined. Your wife had stripped and was on the examination table. Dr. Vaught, suspecting some sort of anemia, prepared to draw a blood specimen. Your wife knocked the syringe from her hand and attacked her—"

"But Nancy has no strength." Gustafson was on the verge of tears. "She couldn't possibly—"

"She's a big woman, Mr. Gustafson. Virginia Vaught was half her size. And your wife was powered by the energy of a strong emotion. Where is she now?"

"At home."

"Go to her. Lieutenant Ritter will drive you there. Find

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out if she has any scratches on her body. Or if you prefer, we can have a jail matron examine her. You understand, of course, that if the scratches are present, she will have to go to headquarters with Lieutenant Ritter."

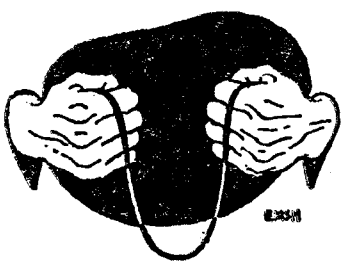
The scratches were there, all right, as Dr. Coffee had predicted. Nancy Gustafson did not deny their origin. She insisted loudly she had acted in self-defense. Dr. Vaught was going to kill her in order to get Nancy's husband. Dr. Vaught had a reputation for collecting men. Everybody knew that.

Yes, she was jealous; she admitted it. Wildly jealous. She knew that the doctor had been having secret trysts with Gus. She had followed her one day at lunchtime. And he was always calling up, asking for Dr. Vaught. She knew his voice, even though he tried to disguise it. The very afternoon she had killed the doctor, he had phoned, and she had recognized his voice.

The doctor had said she was going to do it today. So naturally when the doctor had come at her with a big hypodermic, Nancy had had to kill her to save her own life, hadn't she?

"What tragic waste of two lives," said Dr. Coffee the next day when Max Ritter reported on Nancy's reaction.

A third broken life had at least been started on the road to mending. Booker T. Washington Jones had been released from the prison ward, but was staying on at the county hospital while they experimented with methadone dosage. He had applied to his probation officer for permission to take graduate studies in sociology at Northbank University, with a view to working with and helping drug addicts. He wanted to be able to do for others what Virginia Vaught had started to do for him.



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a NEW *Captain Leopold story by*

EDWARD D. HOCH

We usually think of Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin (1841) as the world's first fictional detective. And that statement is true, in a modern sense. But, of course, there were forerunners—among others, Daniel (in the Bible), Voltaire's Zadig (1747), William Leggett's Jim Buckhorn (1827), Francois Eugene Vidocq (1828), and Charles Dickens' "officers from Bow Street," Blathers and Duff (1838).

Similarly, we usually think of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" as the world's first locked-room detective story (1841). And that statement is also true, in a modern sense—the forerunners were primitive attempts at the theme of the "hermetically sealed chamber." And after Poe, of course, came the remarkably ingenious development of the locked-room gambit—by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1851), Thomas Bailey Aldrich (1862), Israel Zangwill (1892), Gaston Leroux (1907), and the king of them all, John Dickson Carr (Carter Dickson).

Now, one would think, since the limits even of mental and creative ingenuity are not infinite, that in 130 years the multitudinous mysterymongers would have exhausted the plot possibilities of the locked-room murder. Perish the thought! Infinity is a long way off. Here, for example, is a brand-new wrinkle on the locked room—and it will, we guarantee, positively baffle you . . .

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THE LEOPOLD LOCKED ROOM

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Captain Leopold had never spoken to anyone about his divorce, and it was a distinct surprise to Lieutenant Fletcher when he suddenly said, "Did I ever tell you about my wife, Fletcher?"

They were just coming up from the police pistol range in the basement of headquarters after their monthly target practise, and it hardly seemed a likely time to be discussing past marital troubles. Fletcher glanced at him sideways and answered, "No, I guess you never did, Captain."

They had reached the top of the stairs and Leopold turned in to the little room where the coffee, sandwich, and soft-drink machines were kept. They called it the lunchroom, but only by the boldest stretch of the imagination could the little collection of tables and chairs qualify as such. Rather it was a place where off-duty cops could sit and chat, which was what Leopold and Fletcher were doing now.

Fletcher bought the coffee and put the steaming paper cups on the table between them. He had never seen Leopold quite this open and personal before, anxious to talk about a life that had existed far beyond the limits of Fletcher's friendship. "She's coming back," Leopold said simply, and it took Fletcher an instant to grasp the meaning of his words.

"Your wife is coming back?"

"My ex-wife."

"Here? What for?"

Leopold sighed and played with the little bag of sugar that Fletcher had given him with his coffee. "Her niece is getting married. Our niece."

"I never knew you had one."

"She's been away at college. Her name is Vicki Nelson, and she's marrying a young lawyer named Moore. And Monica is coming back east for the wedding."

"I never even knew her name," Fletcher observed, taking a sip of his coffee. "Haven't you seen her since the divorce?"

Leopold shook his head. "Not for fifteen years. It was a funny thing. She wanted to be a movie star, and I guess fifteen years ago lots of girls still thought about being movie

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stars. Monica was intelligent and very pretty—but probably no prettier than hundreds of other girls who used to turn up in Hollywood every year back in those days. I was just starting on the police force then, and the future looked pretty bright for me here. It would have been foolish of me to toss up everything just to chase her wild dream out to California. Well, pretty soon it got to be an obsession with her, really bad. She'd spend her afternoons in movie theaters and her evenings watching old films on television. Finally, when I still refused to go west with her, she just left me."

"Just walked out?"

Leopold nodded. "It was a blessing, really, that we didn't have children. I heard she got a few minor jobs out there—as an extra, and some technical stuff behind the scenes. Then apparently she had a nervous breakdown. About a year later I received the official word that she'd divorced me. I heard that she recovered and was back working, and I think she had another marriage that didn't work out."

"Why would she come back for the wedding?"

"Vicki is her niece and also her godchild. We were just married when Vicki was born, and I suppose Monica might consider her the child we never had. In any event, I know she still hates me, and blames me for everything that's gone wrong with her life. She told a friend once a few years ago she wished I were dead."

"Do you have to go to this wedding, too, Captain?"

"Of course. If I stayed away it would be only because of her. At least I have to drop by the reception for a few minutes." Leopold smiled ruefully. "I guess that's why I'm telling you all this, Fletcher. I want a favor from you."

"Anything, Captain. You know that."

"I know it seems like a childish thing to do, but I'd like you to come out there with me. I'll tell them I'm working, and that I can only stay for a few minutes. You can wait outside in the car if you want. At least they'll see you there and believe my excuse."

Fletcher could see the importance of it to Leopold, and the effort that had gone into the asking. "Sure," he said. "Be glad to. When is it?"

"This Saturday. The reception's in the afternoon, at Sunset Farms."

Leopold had been to Sunset Farms only once before, at the wedding of a patrolman whom he'd especially liked. It was a

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low rambling place at the end of a paved driveway, overlooking a wooded valley and a gently flowing creek. If it had ever been a farm, that day was long past; but for wedding receptions and retirement parties it was the ideal place. The interior of the main building was, in reality, one huge square room, divided by accordion doors to make up to four smaller square rooms.

For the wedding of Vicki Nelson and Ted Moore three-quarters of the large room was in use, with only the last set of accordion doors pulled shut its entire width and locked. The wedding party occupied a head table along one wall, with smaller tables scattered around the room for the families and friends. When Leopold entered the place at five minutes of two on Saturday afternoon, the hired combo was just beginning to play music for dancing.

He watched for a moment while Vicki stood, radiant, and allowed her new husband to escort her to the center of the floor. Ted Moore was a bit older than Leopold had expected, but as the pair glided slowly across the floor, he could find no visible fault with the match. He helped himself to a glass of champagne punch and stood ready to intercept them as they left the dance floor.

"It's Captain Leopold, isn't it?" someone asked. A face from his past loomed up, a tired man with a gold tooth in the front of his smile. "I'm Immy Fontaine, Monica's step-brother."

"Sure," Leopold said, as if he'd remembered the man all along. Monica had rarely mentioned Immy, and Leopold recalled meeting him once or twice at family gatherings. But the sight of him now, gold tooth and all, reminded Leopold that Monica was somewhere nearby, that he might confront her at any moment.

"We're so glad you could come," someone else said, and he turned to greet the bride and groom as they came off the dance floor. Up close, Vicki was a truly beautiful girl, clinging to her new husband's arm like a proper bride.

"I wouldn't have missed it for anything," he said.

"This is Ted," she said, making the introductions. Leopold shook his hand, silently approving the firm grip and friendly eyes.

"I understand you're a lawyer," Leopold said, making conversation.

"That's right, sir. Mostly civil cases, though. I don't tangle much with criminals."

They chatted for a few more seconds before the pressure of

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guests broke them apart. The luncheon was about to be served, and the more hungry ones were already lining up at the buffet tables. Vicki and Ted went over to start the line, and Leopold took another glass of champagne punch.

"I see the car waiting outside," Immy Fontaine said, moving in again. "You got to go on duty?"

Leopold nodded. "Just this glass and I have to leave."

"Monica's in from the west coast."

"So I heard."

A slim man with a mustache jostled against him in the crush of the crowd and hastily apologized. Fontaine seized the man by the arm and introduced him to Leopold. "This here's Dr. Felix Thursby. He came east with Monica. Doc, I want you to meet Captain Leopold, her ex-husband."

Leopold shook hands awkwardly, embarrassed for the man and for himself. "A fine wedding," he mumbled. "Your first trip east?"

Thursby shook his head. "I'm from New York. Long ago."

"I was on the police force there once," Leopold remarked.

They chatted for a few more minutes before Leopold managed to edge away through the crowd.

"Leaving so soon?" a harsh unforgettable voice asked.

"Hello, Monica. It's been a long time."

He stared down at the handsome, middle-aged woman who now blocked his path to the door. She had gained a little weight, especially in the bosom, and her hair was graying. Only the eyes startled him, and frightened him just a bit. They had the intense wild look he'd seen before on the faces of deranged criminals.

"I didn't think you'd come. I thought you'd be afraid of me," she said.

"That's foolish. Why should I be afraid of you?"

The music had started again, and the line from the buffet tables was beginning to snake lazily about the room. But for Leopold and Monica they might have been alone in the middle of a desert.

"Come in here," she said, "where we can talk." She motioned toward the end of the room that had been cut off by the accordion doors. Leopold followed her, helpless to do anything else. She unlocked the doors and pulled them apart, just wide enough for them to enter the unused quarter of the large room. Then she closed and locked the doors behind them, and stood facing him. They were two people, alone in a

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bare unfurnished room.

They were in an area about thirty feet square, with the windows at the far end and the locked accordion doors at Leopold's back. He could see the afternoon sun cutting through the trees outside, and the gentle hum of the air conditioner came through above the subdued murmur of the wedding guests.

"Remember the day we got married?" she asked.

"Yes. Of course."

She walked to the middle window, running her fingers along the frame, perhaps looking for the latch to open it. But it stayed closed as she faced him again. "Our marriage was as drab and barren as this room. Lifeless, unused!"

"Heaven knows I always wanted children, Monica."

"You wanted nothing but your damned police work!" she shot back, eyes flashing as her anger built.

"Look, I have to go. I have a man waiting in the car."

"Go! That's what you did before, wasn't it? *Go, go!* Go out to your damned job and leave me to struggle for myself. Leave me to—"

"You walked out on me, Monica. Remember?" he reminded her softly. She was so defenseless, without even a purse to swing at him.

"Sure I did! Because I had a career waiting for me! I had all the world waiting for me! And you know what happened because you wouldn't come along? You know what happened to me out there? They took my money and my self-respect and what virtue I had left. They made me into a tramp, and when they were done they locked me up in a mental hospital for three years. Three years!"

"I'm sorry."

"Every day while I was there I thought about you. I thought about how it would be when I got out. Oh, I thought. And planned. And schemed. You're a big detective now. Sometimes your cases even get reported in the California papers." She was pacing back and forth, caged, dangerous. "Big detective. But I can still destroy you just as you destroyed me!"

He glanced over his shoulder at the locked accordion doors, seeking a way out. It was a thousand times worse than he'd imagined it would be. She was mad—mad and vengeful and terribly dangerous. "You should see a doctor, Monica."

Her eyes closed to mere slits. "I've seen doctors." Now she paused before the middle window, facing him. "I came all the way east for this day, because I thought you'd be

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here. It's so much better than your apartment, or your office, or a city street. There are one hundred and fifty witnesses on the other side of those doors."

"What in hell are you talking about?"

Her mouth twisted in a horrible grin. "You're going to know what I knew. Bars and cells and disgrace. You're going to know the despair I felt all those years."

"Monica—"

At that instant perhaps twenty feet separated them. She lifted one arm, as if to shield herself, then screamed in terror. "No! Oh, God, no!"

Leopold stood frozen, unable to move, as a sudden gunshot echoed through the room. He saw the bullet strike her in the chest, toppling her backward like the blow from a giant fist. Then somehow he had his own gun out of its belt holster and he swung around toward the doors.

They were still closed and locked. He was alone in the room with Monica.

He looked back to see her crumple on the floor, blood spreading in a widening circle around the torn black hole in her dress. His eyes went to the windows, but all three were still closed and unbroken. He shook his head, trying to focus his mind on what had happened.

There was noise from outside, and a pounding on the accordion doors. Someone opened the lock from the other side, and the gap between the doors widened as they were pulled open. "What happened?" someone asked. A woman guest screamed as she saw the body. Another toppled in a faint.

Leopold stepped back, aware of the gun still in his hand, and saw Lieutenant Fletcher fighting his way through the mob of guests. "Captain, what is it?"

"She . . . Someone shot her."

Fletcher reached out and took the gun from Leopold's hand—carefully, as one might take a broken toy from a child. He put it to his nose and sniffed, then opened the cylinder to inspect the bullets. "It's been fired recently, Captain. One shot." Then his eyes seemed to cloud over, almost to the point of tears. "Why the hell did you do it?" he asked. "Why?"

Leopold saw nothing of what happened then. He only had vague and splintered memories of someone examining her and saying she was still alive, of an ambulance and much confusion. Fletcher drove him down to headquarters, to the Commissioner's office, and he sat there and waited, running

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his moist palms up and down his trousers. He was not surprised when they told him she had died on the way to Southside Hospital. Monica had never been one to do things by halves.

The men—the detectives who worked under him—came to and left the Commissioner's office, speaking in low tones with their heads together, occasionally offering him some embarrassed gesture of condolence. There was an aura of sadness over the place, and Leopold knew it was for him.

"You have nothing more to tell us, Captain?" the Commissioner asked. "I'm making it as easy for you as I can."

"I didn't kill her," Leopold insisted again. "It was someone else."

"Who? How?"

He could only shake his head. "I wish I knew. I think in some mad way she killed herself, to get revenge on me."

"She shot herself with *your* gun, while it was in *your* holster, and while *you* were standing twenty feet away?"

Leopold ran a hand over his forehead. "It couldn't have been my gun. Ballistics will prove that."

"But your gun had been fired recently, and there was an empty cartridge in the chamber."

"I can't explain that. I haven't fired it since the other day at target practise, and I reloaded it afterwards."

"Could she have hated you that much, Captain?" Fletcher asked. "To frame you for her murder?"

"She could have. I think she was a very sick woman. If I did that to her—if I was the one who made her sick—I suppose I deserve what's happening to me now."

"The hell you do," Fletcher growled. "If you say you're innocent, Captain, I'm sticking by you." He began pacing again, and finally turned to the Commissioner. "How about giving him a paraffin test, to see if he's fired a gun recently?"

The Commissioner shook his head. "We haven't used that in years. You know how unreliable it is, Fletcher. Many people have nitrates or nitrites on their hands. They can pick them up from dirt, or fertilizers, or fireworks, or urine, or even from simply handling peas or beans. Anyone who smokes tobacco can have deposits on his hands. There are some newer tests for the presence of barium or lead, but we don't have the necessary chemicals for those."

Leopold nodded. The Commissioner had risen through the ranks. He wasn't simply a

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political appointee, and the men had always respected him. Leopold respected him. "Wait for the ballistics report," he said. "That'll clear me."

So they waited. It was another 45 minutes before the phone rang and the Commissioner spoke to the ballistics man. He listened, and grunted, and asked one or two questions. Then he hung up and faced Leopold across the desk.

"The bullet was fired from your gun," he said simply. "There's no possibility of error. I'm afraid we'll have to charge you with homicide."

The routines he knew so well went on into Saturday evening, and when they were finished Leopold was escorted from the courtroom to find young Ted Moore waiting for him. "You should be on your honeymoon," Leopold told him.

"Vicki couldn't leave till I'd seen you and tried to help. I don't know much about criminal law, but perhaps I could arrange bail."

"That's already been taken care of," Leopold said. "The grand jury will get the case next week."

"I—I don't know what to say. Vicki and I are both terribly sorry."

"So am I." He started to walk away, then turned back. "Enjoy your honeymoon."

"We'll be in town overnight, at the Towers, if there's anything I can do."

Leopold nodded and kept on walking. He could see the reflection of his guilt in young Moore's eyes. As he got to his car, one of the patrolmen he knew glanced his way and then quickly in the other direction. On a Saturday night no one talked to wife murderers. Even Fletcher had disappeared.

Leopold decided he couldn't face the drab walls of his office, not with people avoiding him. Besides, the Commissioner had been forced to suspend him from active duty pending grand jury action and the possible trial. The office didn't even belong to him any more. He cursed silently and drove home to his little apartment, weaving through the dark streets with one eye out for a patrol car. He wondered if they'd be watching him, to prevent his jumping bail. He wondered what he'd have done in the Commissioner's shoes.

The eleven o'clock news on television had it as the lead item, illustrated with a black-and-white photo of him taken during a case last year. He shut off the television without listening to their comments and went back outside, walking down to the corner for an early

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edition of the Sunday paper. The front-page headline was as bad as he'd expected: *Detective Captain Held in Slaying of Ex-Wife.*

On the way back to his apartment, walking slowly, he tried to remember what she'd been like—not that afternoon, but before the divorce. He tried to remember her face on their wedding day, her soft laughter on their honeymoon. But all he could remember were those mad vengeful eyes. And the bullet ripping into her chest.

Perhaps he had killed her after all. Perhaps the gun had come into his hand so easily he never realized it was there.

"Hello, Captain."

"I—Fletcher! What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for you. Can I come in?"

"Well . . ."

"I've got a six-pack of beer. I thought you might want to talk about it."

Leopold unlocked his apartment door. "What's there to talk about?"

"If you say you didn't kill her, Captain, I'm willing to listen to you."

Fletcher followed him into the tiny kitchen and popped open two of the beer cans. Leopold accepted one of them and dropped into the nearest chair. He felt utterly exhausted, drained of even the strength to fight back.

"She framed me, Fletcher," he said quietly. "She framed me as neatly as anything I've ever seen. The thing's impossible, but she did it."

"Let's go over it step by step, Captain. Look, the way I see it there are only three possibilities: either you shot her, she shot herself, or someone else shot her. I think we can rule out the last one. The three windows were locked on the outside and unbroken, the room was bare of any hiding place, and the only entrance was through the accordion doors. These were closed and locked, and although they could have been opened from the other side you certainly would have seen or heard it happen. Besides, there were one hundred and fifty wedding guests on the other side of those doors. No one could have unlocked and opened them and then fired the shot, all without being seen."

Leopold shook his head. "But it's just as impossible that she could have shot herself. I was watching her every minute. I never looked away once. There was nothing in her hands, not even a purse. And the gun that shot her was in my holster, on my belt. I never drew it till *after* the shot was fired."

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Fletcher finished his beer and reached for another can. "I didn't look at her close, Captain, but the size of the hole in her dress and the powder burns point to a contact wound. The Medical Examiner agrees, too. She was shot from no more than an inch or two away. There were grains of powder in the wound itself, though the bleeding had washed most of them away."

"But she had nothing in her hand," Leopold repeated. "And there was nobody standing in front of her with a gun. Even I was twenty feet away."

"The thing's impossible, Captain."

Leopold grunted. "Impossible—unless I killed her."

Fletcher stared at his beer. "How much time do we have?"

"If the grand jury indicts me for first-degree murder, I'll be in a cell by next week."

Fletcher frowned at him. "What's with you, Captain? You almost act resigned to it! Hell, I've seen more fight in you on a routine holdup!"

"I guess that's it, Fletcher. The fight is gone out of me. She's drained every drop of it. She's had her revenge."

Fletcher sighed and stood up. "Then I guess there's really nothing I can do for you, Captain. Good night."

Leopold didn't see him to the door. He simply sat there, hunched over the table. For the first time in his life he felt like an old man.

Leopold slept late Sunday morning, and awakened with the odd sensation that it had all been a dream. He remembered feeling the same way when he'd broken his wrist chasing a burglar. In the morning, on just awakening, the memory of the heavy cast had always been a dream, until he moved his arm. Now, rolling over in his narrow bed, he saw the Sunday paper where he'd tossed it the night before. The headline was still the same. The dream was a reality.

He got up and showered and dressed, reaching for his holster out of habit before he remembered he no longer had a gun. Then he sat at the kitchen table staring at the empty beer cans, wondering what he would do with his day. With his life.

The doorbell rang and it was Fletcher. "I didn't think I'd be seeing you again," Leopold mumbled, letting him in.

Fletcher was excited, and the words tumbled out of him almost before he was through the door. "I think I've got something, Captain! It's not much, but it's a start. I was down at headquarters first thing this morning, and I got

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hold of the dress Monica was wearing when she was shot."

Leopold looked blank. "The dress?"

Fletcher was busy unwrapping the package he'd brought. "The Commissioner would have my neck if he knew I brought this to you, but look at this hole!"

Leopold studied the jagged, blood-caked rent in the fabric. "It's large," he observed, "but with a near-contact wound the power burns would cause that."

"Captain, I've seen plenty of entrance wounds made by a .38 slug. I've even caused a few of them. But I never saw one that looked like this. Hell, it's not even round!"

"What are you trying to tell me, Fletcher?" Suddenly something stirred inside him. The juices were beginning to flow again.

"The hole in her dress is much larger and more jagged than the corresponding wound in her chest, Captain. That's what I'm telling you. The bullet that killed her couldn't have made this hole. No way! And that means maybe she wasn't killed when we thought she was."

Leopold grabbed the phone and dialed the familiar number of the Towers Hotel. "I hope they slept late this morning."

"Who?"

"The honeymooners." He spoke sharply into the phone, giving the switchboard operator the name he wanted, and then waited. It was a full minute before he heard Ted Moore's sleepy voice answering on the other end. "Ted, this is Leopold. Sorry to bother you."

The voice came alert at once. "That's all right, Captain. I told you to call if there was anything—"

"I think there is. You and Vicki between you must have a pretty good idea of who was invited to the wedding. Check with her and tell me how many doctors were on the invitation list."

Ted Moore was gone for a few moments and then he returned. "Vicki says you're the second person who asked her that?"

"Oh? Who was the first?"

"Monica. The night before the wedding, when she arrived in town with Dr. Thursby. She casually asked if he'd get to meet any other doctors at the reception. But Vicki told her he was the only one. Of course we hadn't invited him, but as a courtesy to Monica we urged him to come."

"Then after the shooting, it was Thursby who examined her? No one else?"

"He was the only doctor. He told us to call an ambulance

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and rode to the hospital with her."

"Thank you, Ted. You've been a big help."

"I hope so, Captain."

Leopold hung up and faced Fletcher. "That's it. She worked it with this guy Thursby. Can you put out an alarm for him?"

"Sure can," Fletcher said. He took the telephone and dialed the unlisted squadroom number. "Dr. Felix Thursby? Is that his name?"

"That's it. The only doctor there, the only one who could help Monica with her crazy plan of revenge."

Fletcher completed issuing orders and hung up the phone. "They'll check his hotel and call me back."

"Get the Commissioner on the phone, too. Tell him what we've got."

Fletcher started to dial and then stopped, his finger in mid-air. "What *have* we got, Captain?"

The Commissioner sat behind his desk, openly unhappy at being called to headquarters on a Sunday afternoon, and listened bleakly to what Leopold and Fletcher had to tell him. Finally he spread his fingers on the desktop and said, "The mere fact that this Dr. Thursby seems to have left town is hardly proof of his guilt, Captain. What you're saying is that the woman wasn't killed until later—that Thursby killed her in the ambulance. But how could he have done that with a pistol that was already in Lieutenant Fletcher's possession, tagged as evidence? And how could he have fired the fatal shot without the ambulance attendants hearing it?"

"I don't know," Leopold admitted.

"Heaven knows, Captain, I'm willing to give you every reasonable chance to prove your innocence. But you have to bring me more than a dress with a hole in it."

"All right," Leopold said. "I'll bring you more."

"The grand jury gets the case this week, Captain."

"I know," Leopold said. He turned and left the office, with Fletcher tailing behind.

"What now?" Fletcher asked.

"We go talk to Immy Fontaine, my ex-wife's stepbrother."

Though he'd never been friendly with Fontaine, Leopold knew where to find him. The tired man with the gold tooth lived in a big old house overlooking the Sound, where on this summer Sunday they found him in the back yard, cooking hot dogs over a charcoal fire.

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He squinted into the sun and said, "I thought you'd be in jail, after what happened."

"I didn't kill her," Leopold said quietly.

"Sure you didn't."

"For a stepbrother you seem to be taking her death right in stride," Leopold observed, motioning toward the fire.

"I stopped worrying about Monica fifteen years ago."

"What about this man she was with? Dr. Thursby?"

Immy Fontaine chuckled. "If he's a doctor I'm a plumber! He has the fingers of a surgeon, I'll admit, but when I asked him about my son's radius that he broke skiing, Thursby thought it was a leg bone. What the hell, though, I was never one to judge Monica's love life. Remember, I didn't even object when she married you."

"Nice of you. Where's Thursby staying while he's in town?"

"He was at the Towers with Monica."

"He's not there any more."

"Then I don't know where he's at. Maybe he's not even staying for her funeral."

"What if I told you Thursby killed Monica?"

He shrugged. "I wouldn't believe you, but then I wouldn't particularly care. If you were smart you'd have killed her fifteen years ago when she walked out on you. That's what I'd have done."

Leopold drove slowly back downtown, with Fletcher grumbling beside him. "Where are we, Captain? It seems we're just going in circles."

"Perhaps we are, Fletcher, but right now there are still too many questions to be answered. If we can't find Thursby I'll have to tackle it from another direction. The bullet, for instance."

"What about the bullet?"

"We're agreed it could not have been fired by my gun, either while it was in my holster or later, while Thursby was in the ambulance with Monica. Therefore, it must have been fired earlier. The last time I fired it was at target practise. Is there any possibility—any chance at all—that Thursby or Monica could have gotten one of the slugs I fired into that target?"

Fletcher put a damper on it. "Captain, we were both firing at the same target. No one could sort out those bullets and say which came from your pistol and which from mine. Besides, how would either of them gain access to the basement target range at police headquarters?"

"I could have an enemy in the department," Leopold said.

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"Nuts! We've all got enemies, but the thing is still impossible. If you believe people in the department are plotting against you, you might as well believe that the entire ballistics evidence was faked."

"It was, somehow. Do you have the comparison photos?"

"They're back at the office. But with the narrow depth of field you can probably tell more from looking through the microscope yourself."

Fletcher drove him to the lab, where they persuaded the Sunday-duty officer to let them have a look at the bullets. While Fletcher and the officer stood by in the interests of propriety, Leopold squinted through the microscope at the twin chunks of lead.

"The death bullet is pretty battered," he observed, but he had to admit that the rifling marks were the same. He glanced at the identification tag attached to the test bullet: *Test slug fired from Smith & Wesson .38 Revolver, serial number 2420547.*

Leopold turned away with a sigh, then turned back.

2420547.

He fished into his wallet and found his pistol permit. *Smith & Wesson 2421622.*

"I remembered those two's on the end," he told Fletcher. "That's not my gun."

"It's the one I took from you, Captain. I'll swear to it!"

"And I believe you, Fletcher. But it's the one fact I needed. It tells me how Dr. Thursby managed to kill Monica in a locked room before my very eyes, with a gun that was in my holster at the time. And it just might tell us where to find the elusive Dr. Thursby."

By Monday morning Leopold had made six long-distance calls to California, working from his desk telephone while Fletcher used the squadroom phone. Then, a little before noon, Leopold, Fletcher, the Commissioner, and a man from the District Attorney's office took a car and drove up to Boston.

"You're sure you've got it figured?" the Commissioner asked Leopold for the third time. "You know we shouldn't allow you to cross the state line while awaiting grand jury action."

"Look, either you trust me or you don't," Leopold snapped. Behind the wheel Fletcher allowed himself a slight smile, but the man from the D.A.'s office was deadly serious.

"The whole thing is so damned complicated," the Commissioner grumbled.

"My ex-wife was a com-

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plicated woman. And remember, she had fifteen years to plan it."

"Run over it for us again," the D.A.'s man said.

Leopold sighed and started talking. "The murder gun wasn't mine. The gun I pulled after the shot was fired, the one Fletcher took from me, had been planted on me some time before."

"How?"

"I'll get to that. Monica was the key to it all, of course. She hated me so much that her twisted brain planned her own murder in order to get revenge on me. She planned it in such a way that it would have been impossible for anyone but me to have killed her."

"Only a crazy woman would do such a thing."

"I'm afraid she was crazy—crazy for vengeance. She set up the entire plan for the afternoon of the wedding reception, but I'm sure they had an alternate in case I hadn't gone to it. She wanted some place where there'd be lots of witnesses."

"Tell them how she worked the bullet hitting her," Fletcher urged.

"Well, that was the toughest part for me. I actually saw her shot before my eyes. I saw the bullet hit her and I saw the blood. Yet I was alone in a locked room with her. There was no hiding place, no opening from which a person or even a mechanical device could have fired the bullet at her. To you people it seemed I must be guilty, especially when the bullet came from the gun I was carrying.

"But I looked at it from a different angle—once Fletcher forced me to look at it at all! I *knew* I hadn't shot her, and since no one else physically could have, I knew no one did! If Monica was killed by a .38 slug, it must have been fired *after* she was taken from that locked room. Since she was dead on arrival at the hospital, the most likely time for her murder—to me, at least—became the time of the ambulance ride, when Dr. Thursby must have hunched over her with careful solicitousness."

"But you *saw* her shot!"

"That's one of the two reasons Fletcher and I were on the phones to Hollywood this morning. My ex-wife worked in pictures, at times in the technical end of movie-making. On the screen there are a number of ways to simulate a person being shot. An early method was a sort of compressed-air gun fired at the actor from just off-camera. These days, especially in the bloodiest of the Western and

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war films, they use a tiny explosive charge fitted under the actor's clothes. Of course the body is protected from burns, and the force of it is directed outward. A pouch of fake blood is released by the explosion, adding to the realism of it."

"And this is what Monica did?"

Leopold nodded. "A call to her Hollywood studio confirmed the fact that she worked on a film using this device. I noticed when I met her that she'd gained weight around the bosom, but I never thought to attribute it to the padding and the explosive device. She triggered it when she raised her arm as she screamed at me."

"Any proof?"

"The hole in her dress was just too big to be an entrance hole from a .38, even fired at close range—too big and too ragged. I can thank Fletcher for spotting that. This morning the lab technicians ran a test on the bloodstains. Some of it was her blood, the rest was chicken blood."

"She was a good actress to fool all those people."

"She knew Dr. Thursby would be the first to examine her. All she had to do was fall over when the explosive charge ripped out the front of her dress."

"What if there had been another doctor at the wedding?"

Leopold shrugged. "Then they would have postponed it. They couldn't take that chance."

"And the gun?"

"I remembered Thursby bumping against me when I first met him. He took my gun and substituted an identical weapon—identical, that it, except for the serial number. He'd fired it just a short time earlier, to complete the illusion. When I drew it I simply played into their hands. There I was, the only person in the room with an apparently dying woman, and a gun that had just been fired."

"But what about the bullet that killed her?"

"Rifling marks on slugs are made by the lands in the rifled barrel of a gun causing grooves in the lead of a bullet. A bullet fired through a smooth tube has no rifling marks."

"What in hell kind of gun has a smooth tube for a barrel?" the Commissioner asked.

"A home-made one, like a zip gun. Highly inaccurate, but quite effective when the gun is almost touching the skin of the victim. Thursby fired a shot from the pistol he was to plant on me, probably into a pillow

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or some other place where he could retrieve the undamaged slug. Then he reused the rifled slug on another cartridge and fired it with his home-made zip gun, right into Monica's heart. The original rifling marks were still visible and no new ones were added."

"The ambulance driver and attendant didn't hear the shot?"

"They would have stayed up front, since he was a doctor riding with a patient. It gave him a chance to get the padded explosive mechanism off her chest, too. Once that was away, I imagine he leaned over her, muffling the zip gun as best he could, and fired the single shot that killed her. Remember, an ambulance on its way to a hospital is a pretty noisy place—it has a siren going all the time."

They were entering downtown Boston now, and Leopold directed Fletcher to a hotel near the Common. "I still don't believe the part about switching the guns," the D.A.'s man objected. "You mean to tell me he undid the strap over your gun, got out the gun, and substituted another one—all without your knowing it?"

Leopold smiled. "I mean to tell you only one type of person could have managed it—an expert, professional pickpocket. The type you see occasionally doing an act in night clubs and on television. That's how I knew where to find him. We called all over Southern California till we came up with someone who knew Monica and knew she'd dated a man named Thompson who had a pickpocket act. We called Thompson's agent and discovered he's playing a split week at a Boston lounge, and is staying at this hotel."

"What if he couldn't have managed it without your catching on? Or what if you hadn't been wearing your gun?"

"Most detectives wear their guns off-duty. If I hadn't been, or if he couldn't get it, they'd simply have changed their plan. He must have signaled her when he'd safely made the switch."

"Here we are," Fletcher said. "Let's go up."

The Boston police had two men waiting to meet them, and they went up in the elevator to the room registered in the name of Max Thompson. Fletcher knocked on the door, and when it opened the familiar face of Felix Thursby appeared. He no longer wore the mustache, but he had the same slim surgeon-like fingers that Immy Fontaine had noticed. Not a doctor's fingers, but a pickpocket's.

"We're taking you in for questioning," Fletcher said, and

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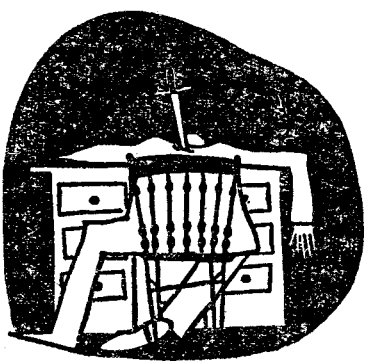
the Boston detectives issued the standard warnings of his legal rights.

Thursby blinked his tired eyes at them, and grinned a bit when he recognized Leopold. "She said you were smart. She said you were a smart cop."

"Did you have to kill her?" Leopold asked.

"I didn't. I just held the gun there and she pulled the trigger herself. She did it all herself, except for switching the guns. She hated you that much."

"I know," Leopold said quietly, staring at something far away. "But I guess she must have hated herself just as much."



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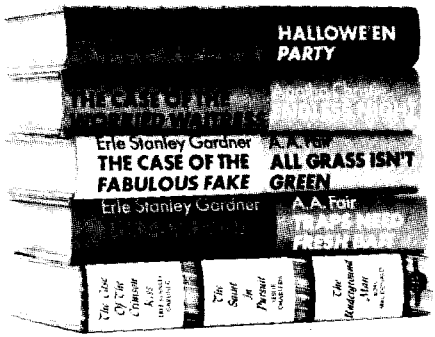

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